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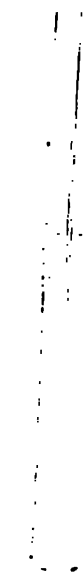
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FATES  
A  
FIDDLER









## FATE'S A FIDDLER

“What if skies be wan and chill?  
What if winds be harsh and stale?  
Presently the east will thrill,  
And the sad and shrunken sail,  
Belying with a kindly gale,  
Bears you sunwards, while your chance  
Sends you back the hopeful hail:—  
‘Fate’s a fiddler, Life’s a dance.’”

HENLEY



# HE'S A FIDDLER

BY

EDWARD GEORGE PINKNEY.

PLAYS IN TWO

ACTS. PAPER.



EMERALD MATTHEWSON, NEW YORK.

NEW YORK.

1904.



STARBRIGHT

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# FATE'S A FIDDLER



# FATE'S A FIDDLER

BY

EDWIN GEORGE PINKHAM

Illustrated by

LESTER RALPH

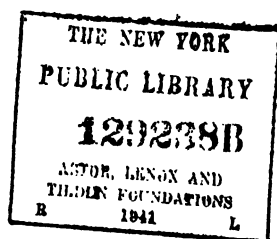


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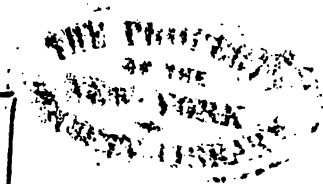
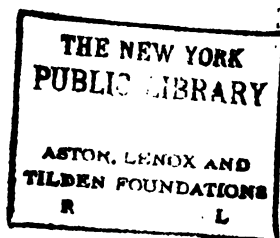
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# FATE'S A FIDDLER

## CHAPTER I

### THE BOOKSHOP

**I**N a district of Boston that had just taken upon itself metropolitan honors, in the basement front of a staid brick dwelling of the description inhabited at one time by the solid merchants of the town, but now exhibiting a hopeless breaking out of the professional signs of second-class attorneys, furniture brokers, and painless dentists; and at the corner of a street adjacent to a spot historic in American annals, what I have to tell of myself has its unheroic beginning.

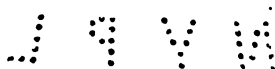
I first became conscious of my small self there at about the time when my head was level with the window sill, looking up through the grimed panes at the feet of the passing population, just visible (with mighty little leg) through the narrow space between the top of the window and the level of the sidewalk. What of feet I saw there—some clinking smartly by, some shuffling along aimlessly, some prosperously and creakingly shod and some very much down at the heel—constituted and circumscribed my knowledge and view of the world about me, and reduced my philosophic speculations to calculating the probability of the next pair having turned-up trousers, or stopping to scrape themselves on the iron grating over the coal hole, or to execute a jig to the whistled accompaniment of their owner; all of which phenomena, my observation taught me, might be expected to reward the watcher during the course of a few minutes. That I should form fantastic opinions about

the appearance, character, and occupations of the invisible and mysterious owners of these feet, was, I suppose, only natural and childlike; that I should make the phantom personages thus created my intimate companions, follow them to their homes, weave romances about them, marry them, make their fortunes, and bury them one by one with elaborate funeral arrangements, was, I believe, peculiarly the fancy of the imaginative, romance-loving child I was, that grew into the man I was to be.

The room that thus forms the scenes of my earliest recollections was one of three that occupied one side of the sub-story of the house, and in these three rooms, in a permanent atmosphere of soapsuds and boiled dinner, I lived with my father and mother, and here too my father carried on his business. That business was described, with something of commercial hyperbole, by the wooden sign which swung over the door and just missed knocking off the head of the prospective customer as he plunged down the stone steps into the shop:

BERMONDSEY BIBBUS  
Dealer in New and Second Hand Books  
Rare Editions Bought and Sold  
Manuscripts Authenticated

In justice to my father I am bound to say with respect to this pronouncement, that he undoubtedly would have bought rare editions if he had had the money, and would have sold them if he could have found a customer. As to what he meant by "Manuscripts authenticated" I have not even now the slightest idea, and I doubt if he had. He had a weakness for flourishes of this sort, and, I believe, sometimes spoke of himself as a bibliographer.



The shop where my father's stock was displayed, occupied the front room, whose windows, as I have recorded, just topped the sidewalk. Two sides of the room were shelved and pretty well filled with rows of dusty, mildewed volumes of heterogeneous character, which the necessities of their owners had compelled them to part with from time to time over the counter. There were books of every character and description, except that they were all alike in point of age, dilapidation, and smell. It appeared most remarkable to me that people never brought their books to us until they were reduced to this condition. No new or even comparatively new book ever found its way to our shelves. Weazened old men done up in scarfs crept along the sunny side of our street to our steps and signaled for assistance down, and then produced yellow old volumes of religious polemics or treatises on the scientific feeding of live stock. Old ladies in shawls and crushed bonnets laid books on our counter, and wet them with their tears, declaring they were family heirlooms which had been in their possession more years than they could remember at that particular moment, but which they were compelled to part with now for reasons which delicacy forbore them more than to hint at. Occasionally too there appeared strange inconsistencies between our customers and their literary habits and tastes, as indicated by the books they brought, which my young understanding found hard to reconcile; as when we received the classics from the hands of tearful owners who I sometimes thought seemed imperfectly acquainted with their titles.

Upon the square wooden columns which supported the ceiling, and at other points of vantage, were displayed some highly-colored prints of the Boston Massacre (showing our countrymen receiving the British fire at a range of three feet, with an equanimity I confess I thought suicidal), the Battle of Bunker Hill, and Washington Crossing the Delaware. Daniel Webster in a high hat that rested

on his ears, and a map of North America (showing the United States dotted with cities and a network of railroads, and Canada and Mexico apparently uninhabited deserts), completed the interior of the shop as I remember it.

In the rear of the shop were our living rooms, two in number, in one of which I slept, and in which I have many times started from my bed thinking it was morning, only to find the gaslight streaming in from the other room where my parents sat talking, and the clock not yet gone nine. The other room (mine was a mere closet) we called the parlor in polite conversation; but my father and mother slept there, and it was likewise living and dining room. These rooms were a sort of barracks in appearance, in respect of being piled up with effects for which there was no proper place; of the dishes being kept in a trunk, the coal on the floor in a corner and the family wash on the foot of my bed, where my short legs gave no immediate promise of disputing that place with it. I doubt if any effort was ever made to improve these arrangements. I know it to have been an hallucination of both my parents that we were always about to move, and that they continued for many years to consider our occupation of these quarters as merely temporary.

My father, I know, had made various spasmodic attempts to better his condition, but without result, except that each recurring failure confirmed him in a long-cherished belief that his proper field was the law. He had at one time, I remember, secured an insurance agency on commission, and tramped the city for many days on this business; but he met with no success, and the only satisfaction he had was the vanquishing in debate of a rival agent who undertook to prove to him (and came to the shop of an evening for that purpose), that my father's company was inferior to his own. Years after this I have heard my father say, shaking his great fair head, that if he had put the time he had spent studying the mortality tables into the law, he had no doubt

he could have ultimately led the Boston bar. My mother agreed with him perfectly, and said, "Bermondsey, you will never do yourself justice till you assert yourself." At another time he built great hopes on an advertisement that appeared in the paper, for an assistant in a lumber office down at the docks. He answered it, (I can see him now reading his letter over to himself, and calling my mother to look), and immediately took up cube root, and I have seen him, with my mother's help, measuring up the wainscoting in the room at midnight.

I came early to look upon our condition as unfortunate. I came early to know my father's character, and to share his feelings in regard to his misfortunes, and to be a member of the family council that discussed them. Child that I was, I soon came to know that my parents were children too, no more able to cope with the world, no more experienced in its ways, than was I myself. That I should have learned to call them by their Christian names is no wonder to me now.

My father was a great, fair, handsome man, with a closely shaven, fresh-colored face, fine blue eyes, and a shining expanse of forehead that extended in a straight wide path to the back of his head. The sides and back of his head were covered with a profusion of rich, brown hair that fell in masses over his ears, and lent him a profile like a Greek medal. He had a rich, husky voice, and a rather involved and ornate style of conversation, which was highly thought of among his acquaintances. I suppose he was a little vain of his conversational accomplishments, and a little too fond of presiding over an admiring circle; but he was the kindest man I ever knew, and the most simple.

Our shop was the informal meeting place of a sort of club, whose members were mostly tenants of the upper floors, and who gathered almost nightly to discuss, over their pipes, topics of passing interest. It was a treat for me to slip into the room on these evenings, take up my obscure

station on the far end of the counter, and listen to the talk. To hear my father (who could clear his throat more impressively than any man I ever knew) say, with his inimitable drawl: "Gentlemen, my views on this subject are too well known to this company to render necessary any apology for the remarks I—er—desire to make in contravention of the—er—sentiments expressed, I am happy to say so ably, by my friend there," was to swell my young heart with pride, without my having the slightest idea what he was talking about. The memoirs of a great general of the Civil War, had just appeared at this time, and my father read them aloud nightly to this gathering. I do not think I missed a single reading. My father sat at the table with the light at his elbow, and the book resting on his knee, held open with one hand while the other was thrust loosely into his bosom in readiness to assist his elocution with appropriate gestures. He thoroughly enjoyed himself, and I shall ever remember it to the honor of his singularly equable temper, that the sudden irruption of my mother into the room in the middle of a cavalry charge, with a summons for us both to come to bed, did not ruffle it in the least. "Certainly, my dear, certainly," he said. "Gentlemen, we will continue the—er—reading to-morrow night."

Of business my father had not the slightest notion, and met his inevitable reverses with the greatest good humor. Indeed his misfortunes seemed almost to give him satisfaction, as corroborating his own previously expressed opinions.

"You cannot," he said to me, argumentatively, leaning back in his chair with the fingers of his shapely hands interlocked across his broad breast, and inclining his massive head slightly in my direction, as I sat looking up at him earnestly, "you cannot, in forming an adequate estimate of a man's—er—capabilities, afford to disregard the limitations imposed by his—er—natural and, I may add, intellectual predilections. It has long been known to your mother that my own abilities—er—small though they be, are of a character

peculiarly required for the pursuit of a learned profession, in which many of our greatest intellects have—er—reached their apotheosis. I allude to the law. I have been—er—debarred from—er—embracing it, by the stern dictates of necessity, though I never have, and do not now, doubt that—er—ultimately I shall follow my bent, and actively engage in it. I do not, therefore,” continued my father with a learned air, “find anything incongruous in the proposition that the judicial mind is *not* adapted to the—er—conditions involved in the conduct of a purely commercial enterprise. By which,” he added, with a glance about him and a slight wave of his hand, “I allude to the acquiring by—er—purchase, of books, maps, prints, authenticated manuscripts, and other—er—bibliographical material, and the disposing of the same for a consideration sufficiently over and above the original cost, to insure a profit.”

I murmured assent.

My father had married my mother when they were both under twenty. He was then a clerk in a city warehouse, and in the ten years that preceded my birth had been clerk, accountant, bill collector, salesman for various articles on commission, auctioneer's assistant, and, finally, on coming into possession, through my mother, of the library of a deceased relative (in lieu of the fortune she expected), bookseller, or, as he described himself, bibliographer. I suppose he could have had no idea, when these few hundred miscellaneous volumes came into his hands, that the disposal of them for what he could get would prove so slow a process as to require him to set up as a legitimate dealer; nor that he could, by steady addition to his stock, continue in that business and make a living at it, or become, in fact, the patron of literature that he came to look upon himself to be. Such was the case, however, and with the easy adaptability to circumstances which was a conspicuous trait of his character, he settled down to it, and the years passed and left him as they found him, looking up at his shelves, and,

latterly, me looking up at him, neither of us able to make much out of it.

My mother was a pretty, fluffy creature, who, if the truth must be told, never, I fear, quite knew how to dress herself. Even to my young eyes it was manifest that somehow her pins and hooks did not accomplish their purpose; that there was something wrong with the color combination; and that something—I could not say what—ought to be done to lessen the general effect of her clothes being intended for someone else. She never spent any time in dressing. If she were going out with my father, she would issue forth to the street sticking pins into herself quite at random, while she held her gloves in her mouth, and hung her muff or reticule on my father somewhere. I thought her hair the most beautiful in the world and it *was* a glorious yellow, but she didn't know how to arrange it, and presently didn't try. The patient perseverance with which she put it out of her eyes would almost shake one's belief in the existence of hairpins. In her domestic arrangements it was just the same; she had not the slightest notion of order or comfort. I have seen my father stand in the middle of the room, with a book in his hand, stroking his chin helplessly, and looking round for a place to sit down. "For goodness' sake, Bermondsey," I have heard my mother say, "do sit down somewhere, dear, and don't stand in the light." She would then clear a chair for him by tipping its contents forward on the floor, and they would put the light between them, and fall to reading. It might be any hour after that, when my father, looking up from his book and catching sight of me, would say, "Don't you think, dear, Sumner ought to go to bed?" And perhaps I went, and perhaps I curled up between them with my head in my mother's lap, and my feet in my father's, and slept there.

My mother had at times her moments of depression, and at such periods my father and I found our situations particularly delicate. There was an old yellow volume of lach-



rymose poetry in the shop called, I think, *Ladies' Wreaths*, which my mother always produced on these occasions and read with the most distressing results. At the sight of my mother with this unfortunate book, my father would immediately become very low, and I would go stealthily about, not daring to play, and feeling like a young criminal. These spells seemed not to obey any regular law in their recurrence but were precipitated by the most trivial and diverse causes. Rent day infallibly brought one; indeed, the first of the month and the *Ladies' Wreaths* may be said to have come hand in hand; but aside from this there was nothing to go by with any certainty. I have known her to send me to the apothecary's for half a dozen pickled limes for a feast, and coming back through the shop have noticed that the familiar volume was missing from its place, and have gone into the street again disconsolately and eaten the limes myself. My father presented at these trying times, in appearance and behavior, a mixture of humility, timidity, conciliation, and self-depreciation that was only less discouraging in its effect upon me than my mother's condition. It was his custom, when he had warning of the coming storm, to waylay me at the door of the shop on my return from play, and, with a certain cautionary uplifting of his finger and a slight jerk of his head in the direction of the parlor, apprise me of the situation there, and putting some pennies in my hand, send me away again to assuage my exile with soda water. A second return home, if still inopportune, produced more pennies, more soda water, and at last tears.

It was the circumstance of these occasional banishments from the society of the parlor that led to my first incursions into the realms of literature as represented by my father's shelves. My investigation among the books had hitherto been confined to deciphering the names of their former owners on the fly-leaves. I was struck, I know, by the number of inscriptions whose character indicated that the

volume had been presented to the owner by a relative or friend, usually at Christmas time. It seemed to me most reprehensible for them to sell them afterwards. There was a sort of vault excavated under the sidewalk at the front of the shop, for what purpose I do not know now, and access was had to it from behind the counter. A number of empty boxes had been thrown in here to get them out of the way, and it now became my habit, when things were not auspicious in the parlor, to retreat to this fastness, and with an end of candle abstracted from the mantel, pass my exile in reading. I am astonished when I look back now to find what a number of books that have been my companions through life first passed under my eye in that earthy cellar, by the yellow light of a tallow candle, while rats scampered under my feet and the hollow footfalls of the people passing echoed over my head. There I read *Waverley* and Cooper, Captain Marryat and Fielding, and, best loved and most revered of all, the Master, Dickens. I had discovered him in a dozen large, flat volumes bound in green cloth, with pictures in faded gilt on the outside covers of Mr. Pickwick, Sydney Carton, Little Nell, Sam Weller, and Mr. Pecksniff. The pages were divided into two columns and the print was fine and difficult to read, but I read them, read them all. Not once or twice, but all the time. I have since come to own my own Dickens in somewhat more pretentious dress (still not quite so elaborate as some), but I do not love him any better than I did in his shabby coverings. Where may he be now, I wonder, dressed as of old? I would know him in a moment; there were two most glaring typographical errors on the first page of *David Copperfield*, and the twelfth and twentieth pages of *Pickwick* were transposed. It has been the fashion at times, I believe, to disparage Dickens. I have read some very superior criticisms of him indeed. But I am always glad, on the whole, to see these, for they make me hunger so for my favorites that I fly to them and revel again as if I were a boy once more in the sidewalk vault.



The first of the month and the *Ladies' Wreaths* may be said to have come hand in hand.

Page 9.



I see the walls of the cellar rise about me ; I see the flaming candle stuck on the deal box ; I see the eager boy bending over the stained pages, and as he reads I see his tears fall, and mine fall with them.

I have often thought it peculiar that in so many traits of character my parents should have been so much alike ; that two persons should, in marrying, combine so much of simplicity, so much of childlike faith in fortune, and so little individual capacity for helping themselves. Each thought the other the most remarkable person that ever lived. My father was particularly impressed with what he thought was self-reliance and initiative in my mother's character, and deferred to her without her suspecting it. She in turn, at no moment of her life, ever doubted that my father was destined to become famous. She leaned on him completely, and thus, strong in their very weakness, supporting each other when neither could have stood alone, they were happy in their illusions and took lightly the buffets of fortune. My advent, which might have been considered by persons in their circumstances to be a rather ambiguous manifestation of the favor of fortune, was hailed by them as a confirmation of their hopes. I have since come to know that my father immediately looked out from his stock and laid by a copy of Cæsar's *Commentaries*, it being his intention that I should have a military career. My mother acquiesced in these arrangements but secretly preferred, I believe, the civil branches of government service as being calculated to lead more expeditiously to the presidency.

My earliest instruction was received from my father, and was directed with a view to impressing me with the magnitude and importance of the information to be derived later from the *Commentaries*. Those formidable-looking volumes were always kept before me on the mantel during my lessons ; and had the effect, I clearly remember, of making the narrative in my lesson about a dog crossing a stream with a piece of meat in his mouth and foolishly dropping it to seize the

other piece reflected in the water, seem particularly insignificant and trivial, and its perusal a waste of time.

Perhaps, could I have foreseen what lay in the years that stretched between me and those *Commentaries*, I would have been less anxious to loose the veil that shut off from my young eyes the world about me, and which once loosened, fell so rapidly away!

## CHAPTER II

### MRS. WALPOLE'S FIRST CARD

THERE existed, at a time in the history of my family which antedates my memory, and did veritably live somewhere, "in the neighborhood," my mother said, "of Beacon Street," a certain important and exalted personage whom I never heard referred to by any other name than "your Uncle Sumner." Why he should have been thus exclusively saddled upon me I could never understand, and I grew, in time, to resent it; inasmuch as his name was never introduced into conversation by my mother except for the purpose of lamenting our lowly fortunes, and comparing them with the condition that would have been ours if she had not frustrated the testamentary intentions of this relative by marrying my father.

When she dwelt too long upon these possibilities, as she was apt to do, my father was always taken with a troublesome cough, which was particularly disconcerting to her, and usually had the effect at last of precipitating tears and the *Ladies' Wreaths*; though I have known her to hold out for a considerable time against it until it became a sort of contest to see which would give in first. A picture of this defunct relative, carefully preserved by my mother in an oval gilt frame and produced on the slightest provocation for exhibition to visitors, showed him to have been a fat-headed old gentleman with no neck to speak of, and two little eyes that were less eyes than mere peep-holes for eyes. He had been, when alive, in the China trade and had amassed a considerable fortune in rice and opium; which

serious occupation had left him no time for the lesser affairs of life, and his declining years found him unmarried, and living alone in a big, empty house in the neighborhood hinted, with no company but his ledgers. But now, like many other men before and since in equal situations, he determined not only to marry, but to marry out of hand with no nonsense about it; like a man who goes to market with the money in his pocket to buy, and not merely to appraise against the time when he will have it. The lady whom he pitched upon was a widow, and having satisfied himself that she was worthy to become Mrs. Sumner, or at least, as worthy as it was in woman to be, conferred that name upon her with the air of a man who was doing the handsome thing without hope of reward, and knew it. This lady had a son about two years old, the fruit of her former marriage, whom his stepfather, considering himself to have already done the handsome thing in marrying his mother, determined should continue to bear his own father's name, reserving his for his own children, whom he doubted not would arrive in good time to receive, husband, and add to, the rice and opium money.

These events had occurred some years after my mother's own marriage and just previous to my birth, and would never have occurred at all, my mother used to say, if her uncle had recognized my father's talents, and taken him into business with him. To which my father retorted, "My love, whatever my talents may be, they do not lie in the direction of extorting from a confiding if almond-eyed people the—er—fruits of their industry, in exchange for shoes made of paper and—er—simulated tinned beef."

In spite of my mother's dwindled hopes, occasioned by her uncle's sudden marriage, she had insisted upon naming me in his honor. My father at first strenuously objected but in the end they lighted upon a happy compromise suggested by him. "*You* shall name the boy, my love, after your uncle, and *I* shall name him after the greatest of—er—Massachu-



setts' great sons, the—er—matchless intellect which so long represented her in the—er—most august legislative body in the world, and whose recent death has left a void in the heart of the nation which even Massachusetts can not fill!"

And so I was christened Sumner.

My great-uncle's wife did not live long after her marriage but died within the year, which occasioned my mother to say that she was not at all surprised, as she had felt it all along in her bones. If her bones were consistent in their intimation to her of intelligence of this nature they must have given her considerable trouble at this time, for her Uncle Sumner followed his wife to the grave in less than three months.

A difference of opinion immediately arising between my parents regarding the propriety of attending the funeral, my mother proceeded to develop her views in a characteristic manner.

"I am sure, Bermondsey," she said, drying her eyes upon her handkerchief and fixing the black-bordered funeral announcement over the mantel, and stepping back to observe the effect, "I am sure we owe it to dear Uncle's memory to pay him this respect after all he intended to do for me. He was very kind to me; he gave me," said my mother, her tears starting afresh, "he gave me three large oranges and a Japanese napkin when I was a little girl, and though the oranges *were* seedy," she pursued, looking up with an air of impartiality, "they were not, I believe, of the eating variety but were intended for keepsakes. If I had preserved them, allowing them to dry slowly, they would, I believe, have exhaled a pleasing fragrance for many years."

"I know, my love," said my father, soothingly, "what your feelings are, and they do you credit; but your Uncle Sumner and myself did not, during his life, sustain toward each other those—er—reciprocal sentiments which would exact from me the—er—same description of feelings which you entertain, and which, my love," he added, "I

am afraid are again about to overpower you. Take my handkerchief."

"No, no," said my mother, putting it by and sobbing violently, "I am, thank Heaven, still able to control myself. Although fragile in body, and inheriting from my mother's family constitutional weaknesses which render it necessary for me to exercise great care not to subject myself to sudden or strong emotion, I have, nevertheless, an iron will, which enables me to bear up under violent shocks in a way that our family physician used to say was little short of marvelous."

"To be sure," continued my father, who was pretty well acquainted with my mother's tendency to irrelevancy in conversation, and never allowed it to break the thread of his own discourse, but always began again just where he had left off, when overwhelmed in this way, "to be sure, he was your relative, although holding himself aloof from—er—social intercourse, but there are, in this case, considerations which transcend, I may say—er—ethically, even the ties of—er—consanguinity. Your deceased relative, in his attitude toward this family, exhibited himself to my mind, very much in the light of an ass. I say it," added my father, firmly, "with all possible respect for him."

"You never appreciated Uncle," returned my mother, with a sigh. "He had his faults; he did not, Bermondsey, recognize your great abilities; in this his judgment was defective, but I am sure he always intended to do something for Sumner, who bears his name."

"Sumner Bibbus," returned my father, swelling, "was named for the most brilliant intellect that ever shone in the—er—halls of debate. A man who—er—dominated the spirit of his age; a profound and elegant scholar; an orator whose thunder anticipated and directed the public opinion of a continent; a statesman who left his imprint indelibly on the history of his—er—country, and a Senator of the United States—Charles Sumner of Massachusetts!"

Although that put an end to the discussion for the time, my mother continued to protest her belief that her Uncle had left a will in my favor and that it would probably be found secreted in the chimney or—her mind was divided on this point—back of the wainscoting. For many weeks after the funeral, for many weeks after the estate had passed into the hands of the administrator, my mother kept the parlor spruced up and wore her best dress in expectation of the arrival of the lawyers with their green bags, come to apprise her of our accession to wealth. All that ever came, however, was a brief letter from Mr. Randolph Walpole, young Harold Portal's guardian and the administrator of the estate, signifying that, in obedience to the directions contained in a codicil of her late uncle's will, the library of the testator (which he had kept in a loft over the stables, packed in cases and roosted on by pigeons) would be delivered to her at any place required, upon settlement of the carrier's charges.

Although, as I have said, these events took place before I was of an age to have personal knowledge of them, I came to know of them later, and with them how my Cousin Harold had been taken to live with his guardian at Swampscott and was put to school there; how he used, once a year, to write a letter to my mother, under his guardian's seal, expressing the unvaried hope that she was well and volunteering the information that he was the same; how my mother, in our Sunday walks, used to lead my father and me through the street where the house of her late uncle stood, now occupied by aliens, and point out to us places in the walls or in the grounds where valuables might be safely concealed; how, in family councils, she used seriously to speculate on the probability, in case I had been a girl, of my Cousin Harold marrying me; and how it was her opinion that some sort of surreptitious watch ought to be maintained over the actions of Mr. Walpole to see that he didn't make away with the estate against my coming into it, and that for this purpose it was highly desirable that my father should, when he took

up the law (as he expected to shortly), give special study to that branch of it which had to do with the probating of wills and the administration of estates held in trust.

When I was, as I now calculate it, about ten years old and had advanced in my observation and study of the world from contemplating the feet of its inhabitants through the window, to contemplating the unobstructed activity of the whole street from the more advantageous point of the railings in front of the shop, I came into the parlor one evening and found my parents in deep consultation over the uncleared tea table, and an open letter lying among the dishes, before them. My father took it up as I entered and motioned me to his side.

"Here is something that concerns you, Sumner," he said, "and we may as well have your opinion on it. A boy cannot begin too young," he continued, turning to my mother, "the practice of forming ideas of his own—er—assisted by the riper judgment of his elders." I believe he added this last clause on seeing the slight shade of disappointment which appeared on my mother's face, at the prospect of not having an opportunity to say something more on the subject. "We have here," continued my father, studying the letter in his hand, "a communication from your Cousin Harold, which conveys an invitation to you to visit him at his guardian's home during the holidays. The invitation is—er—endorsed," he added, referring to a second sheet in his hand, "by Mr. Walpole himself, which is very proper, very proper indeed. Should you like to go?"

"Is it far?" I asked, cautiously.

"Well," returned my father, seeming to think the point well thought of, "no, it's not far; not what you would call *far*," he added confidently,—"say a matter of fifteen miles; it's down to Swampscott, that's where it is."

"Shall either of you go?" I asked. I had never been from home, and the familiar room looked suddenly more attractive at the unexpected thought of leaving it.

"We are not invited," replied my mother with dignity, "and while I am by no means certain that I should go if we were, I do not hesitate to say that Mr. Randolph Walpole—if *that's* his name—in omitting to invite us has shown very bad taste; that's all *I've* got to say. And what is more," continued my mother, in spite of this last assertion, which by the way I have noticed is usually to be taken as a pretty certain indication that the speaker *has* something more to say, "and what is more, I think that for a man who was only a business partner of your Uncle Sumner, and spent most of his time in China, he is taking rather a high tone toward this family, rather a high tone." My mother, not to be outdone by the tone taken by Mr. Walpole, at this point raised her own considerably, and exhibited symptoms rendering it not unlikely that she would throw her apron over her head the next moment; symptoms which my father instantly combated by making a great show of clearing up the tea things, and feigning not to notice the ticklish aspect of affairs; which adroit move on his part had the proper effect and she was presently able to resume without danger.

"People may live in China," she said, "all their lives, and it is not probable that the natives will object to their tone; but a different tone is required, and will be insisted upon, toward *this* family, which, however reduced, represents your late Uncle Sumner. In China, as I say," repeated my mother, determined to press this point home upon us, "the question of what tone one shall adopt concerns only one's self and the Chinese, and I have nothing to say about it; but about the tone one takes toward *this* family I *have* something to say, and I will say it, Bermondsey," added my mother, shaking her head firmly at my father, as if he had pointedly contradicted her; "I will say it to Mr. Randolph Walpole or to Mrs. Randolph Walpole, or to any other Walpole who will present himself here for that purpose, and so you can tell them for me." And my mother began to rock herself in her chair and to hum a tune, as though she

had delivered her mind on the subject once and for all and didn't intend to be drawn out further.

My father coughed apologetically and hitched his chair around two or three times in a propitiatory manner, but made no other move indicating either acceptance or rejection of the delicate commission thus tendered him.

"Well," said I, seating myself and crossing my legs, in which position, with my elbows resting on the arms of the chair and the tips of my fingers touching, I was pleased to think I resembled my father in attitude and appearance, "well, I think I should like to go and see my Cousin Harold, if he has a pony."

"To be sure!" cried my father, brightening up and stealing a look at my mother; "ha! ha! did you hear that, my dear? He says he should like to go if there is a pony. Ha! ha! very good indeed!" But my mother paid no attention to this artful advance, but continued to rock and hum in a manner that seemed to say for her, that if my father thought he could make *her* say another word he would find himself very much mistaken.

My father rubbed hard at the top of his head and looked helplessly at me.

"Should you think it likely," I pursued, thus appealed to, "that my Cousin Harold would have a dog?"

"A dog!" cried my father, brightening up exactly as before and stealing another look at my mother. "Why, bless my soul, I should say so! A dog, do you say? Not the least doubt of it; I should think he might have any number of them. Ahem!"

But my mother was still obdurate and showed no signs of weakening; indeed, if anything she accelerated the rate at which she was rocking, which already bade fair presently to throw her, chair and all, over backwards. Perhaps she saw this and counted upon the effect of it upon our nerves.

"Why," said my father, following up his line of attack,

"you'll go birds'-nesting down there, choosing of course the—er—lower variety of trees for that purpose, commensurate with your size, and leaving the taller trees to your Cousin Harold; and you'll hunt for shells, which, I believe, abound on the shores, though they are not valuable; the popular belief in the existence of pearls concealed in sea-shells," said my father, turning to my mother, "being—er—fallacious and wholly disproved by—er—scientific facts; and you'll disport yourself in many ways which you will not have found practicable in the crowded precincts of a city,—er—that is, if your mother is willing that you should go."

"Oh, don't ask me!" cried my mother, stopping her rocking so suddenly as nearly to precipitate herself forward on the floor, and speaking with a certain rapidity of utterance which was the worst possible sign. "*I'm* nobody; *I'm* not fit to be consulted; *I* can slave my fingers to the bone and thank myself, but no matter; thank Heaven *I'm* not sensitive! Some women might object, I dare say, and stand up for their rights, but that's not *my* way; *I* can bear it. My dear," she added, checking herself as suddenly as she had begun, and turning to me with a deadly kind of calmness that was even more dreadful to behold than her previous condition, "will you step into the shop and bring your mother the blue cloth volume which you will find at the end of the top shelf, near the door?"

I was too well acquainted with the various stages which marked the progress of my mother's "spells," not to understand that her arrival at this point precluded any hope of the further discussion of the subject that night, and my father shared the knowledge. I retreated to my 'cave, and my father went out to take a turn around the Monument. I hope the contemplation of that historic shaft calmed his thought more than the perusal of the exploits of Deerslayer did mine; for after I had turned in that night, I dreamed we were set upon by Indians and that my mother, at a critical moment, delivered some terrifying incantation out of the

*Ladies' Wreaths*, and that our foe fled, uttering cries of terror and dismay.

But the next morning all was again serene. My mother, full of smiles and chatter, discoursed during breakfast on my proposed visit quite gayly, and gently reproached me for not receiving the project with more favor the night before. I saw that it was settled that I should go, and my father enlightened me further while buttering his toast.

"Your cousin's guardian will call for you Saturday when he goes home from his office," he said. "Mr. Walpole is a merchant in the city, and a very successful one I believe; not that I would have you understand," said my father, pausing, "that the success or non-success of any person is to be assumed to demonstrate the ability or non-ability of that person in the particular line in which he is engaged. Remember what I said to you about natural and—er—intellectual predilections. Mr. Walpole," continued my father, observing my other parent, "probably has a bent for commerce and follows it; the result," he added, with a wave of his knife in the air, and falling upon his buttered toast, "is affluence."

"When you arrive at Mr. Walpole's home and are presented to his family," said my mother, taking over the conversation, and speaking with a certain air of gentility which she always assumed when the subject was of a social nature, just as her air was businesslike when the subject was of *that* nature, "I wish you carefully to observe the degree of cordiality with which they receive you, and to conform, in your attitude toward them, strictly *to* that standard. If Mrs. Walpole should inquire after my health," continued my mother, toying with her spoon, "you will present my compliments to her and say *I* inquired after *hers*, but not otherwise. It is for her to set the standard. Whatever that standard may be," said my mother, firmly, "conform to it; no more, no less. We know what is due to us from them, and what is due to them from us. If Mrs. Walpole exhibits,



in her reception of you, a recognition of this fact, do you also recognize it and treat her accordingly. Remember, Sumner, that the dignity of the family is in your hands, and that you represent not only your father and mother, but your Uncle Sumner who is no more. Uncle Sumner left us——”

“His library,” interrupted my father.

“True, dear,” assented my mother, “but that is not what I was going to say. Your Uncle Sumner left us—departed this life—(“Oh,” said my father), before he had come to recognize your father’s talents, but he was not in ignorance of some slight accomplishments which I may claim for myself.” Here my mother thought it necessary to place the tips of three fingers over her mouth and cough that small cough which is understood to express, “You will pardon me, I am sure.” “His observation taught him,” resumed my mother, “that, however great my deficiencies in other directions, I was *not* lacking in dignity. ‘Fanny,’ it was his custom to say, ‘Fanny can be relied upon to support the dignity of the family, however its fortunes be supported,’ and he spoke, I believe, only the truth.”

I had long been accustomed to the half-amusing and half-provoking practice of my parents of holding debates over my head, in which sometimes one attacked and the other defended, or, quite as often, both attacked from different points, the subject they had set up; while both contended for me as though I were an umpire or a political caucus.

“Mr. Walpole’s home,” said my father, now taking the floor in his turn, and balancing his eggspoon on his forefinger as an adventitious aid to his flow of thought, “Mr. Walpole’s home may exhibit to—er—superficial inspection a greater variety of the accessories of—er—wealth and comfort than is afforded under this less pretentious roof; but I do not think, I do *not* think,” said my father, considering, “that you will find there, or anywhere, a greater intellectual—er—latitude than you have been accustomed to

here, where, surrounded,—er—as I may say, by academic groves, the classics vie with the sprightly weavers of fiction for your erudition and entertainment. Cæsar,” continued my father, throwing his eye round the room, and having it arrested by the *Commentaries* on the mantel, “Cæsar looks down upon you from his place yonder, beckoning you into Gaul, while Homer, Virgil, and Euripides contemplate with—er—friendly mien the neighboring shelf, where stand Seneca, Cicero, and Juvenal. In close juxtaposition repose our other companions, Darwin, Huxley, and Adam Smith, each proffering you his rich mine of intellectual ore, while, contemporaries in thought but not in years, Pascal rubs elbows with Paley, and Kant with—er—Schopenhauer. The *literati* of antiquity and the *literati* of modern times conjoin to offer you companionship, establishing with themselves and with you a—er—*rapprochement* as complete as it is fortunate. While I am not,” said my father, looking round, “as proficient in the French tongue as I could wish—unpropitious circumstances intervening to prevent my application to the study of that elegant and polite language—I believe I use the word *rapprochement* correctly, as expressing, more clearly than any word in our own singularly barren language can express, the—er—meaning I wish to convey.”

My father resumed his breakfast after this burst with great satisfaction, and, I have no doubt, an extra flavor had really been imparted to it as by a sauce.

“Mrs. Walpole,” said my mother, resuming her branch of the subject, “is, I believe, a person of some social prominence in Swampscott. I believe I do not intentionally misrepresent the social life of Swampscott when I say that it is *not* the social life of Boston, in the neighborhood of Beacon Street. Mrs. Walpole may know, or she may not know this. When Mrs. Walpole resided in China with her husband, who at that time represented your Uncle Sumner there, she may have known, or she may not have known, that the

social life *there* is not the social life of Boston, in the neighborhood of Beacon Street. When they went to China—for somebody had to go to China,” said my mother, interrupting herself to explain this point, as if our understanding of what was to follow depended upon our not losing sight of it, “somebody had to go to China, and it happened to be the Walpoles, just as it might have happened to be the Joneses, or the Browns, or the Smithers, if Jones, Brown, or Smithers had happened to be in the employ of your Uncle Sumner at the time; though now I think of it,” said my mother, again interrupting herself and thoughtfully crumbing her bread on the cloth, “there *was* a Smithers in the House at one time—or was it Smathers?—a little man with light hair and pimples. He had something to do with the cargoes, I think; manifesting them, do they call it? It is a term, I know, having to do with consigning goods for export. It was either Smithers or Smathers, I cannot now say which. You haven’t heard me speak of him, have you, Bermondsey?”

“No,” said my father, shaking his head, “I do not recall hearing you mention such an individual.”

“Well,” said my mother, “my impression now is that it was Smithers, either John or William Smithers; more probably John, it sounds more natural. Let me see, where was I? (Sumner dear, don’t make that clatter with your fork, you interrupt your mother). Oh, when your Uncle Sumner sent Randolph Walpole to China, he *made* him! That is what he did,” said my mother, ringing her spoon down upon the table and throwing herself back in her chair, after the manner of a person who has demonstrated a proposition and would beg anyone to refute it who could, “he *made* him!” My father seemed to think he could do no less, in the face of this direct challenge, than to shake his head gravely as if to intimate that he wasn’t the man to dispute it. “Now,” resumed my mother, taking up her spoon again, “the Walpoles—or let us, in order to consider this matter fairly, let

us lose their identity for the moment, in stating the proposition, and call them the Browns, assuming for this purpose that the Browns had really been your uncle's choice—Browns then, having been made by this connection, to the scene of their former obscurity. What does Mr. Brown do? Does she, realizing that her elevation to fortune was the result of a chance, that might as easily have fallen to Jones or Smithers, present herself to—I will name no names, but say to a person who was the only living female relative of her benefactor—does she present herself to that lady and say, in effect: 'I find myself, by the favor of your relative (the uncle of your little Sumner here, who, indeed, is named for him), risen to fortune. The condition is new to me, and I am anxious to conduct myself properly, assuming no airs and giving no offense. With this object I wish to place myself under your tutelage, who are competent to instruct me in the ways of society in Boston, in the neighborhood of Beacon Street. You are, besides, closely connected with the font of my prosperity, and your little son (here the impersonated Mrs. Brown patted me on the head with the spoon) is, in all probability, his uncle's heir. I place myself, therefore, unreservedly in your hands; take me and polish me.' Does she do this?" demanded my mother, coming suddenly out of Mrs. Brown and fixing my father sternly with her eye, "Why, you know she did not, Bermondsey; she never came near me! Do you call that gratitude?" My father shook his head, quickly disclaiming having called it that. "Do you call it common decency?" said my mother, following him up. Again my father shook his head. "Well, then," continued my mother, letting him off, "neither do I. You are right, Bermondsey. But I will say this much," she added, as if she had said nothing heretofore, and had reluctantly consented, only after urgent solicitation, to express an opinion, "I will say *this* much, and that is, that Mrs. Walpole would have done better if she *had* shown gratitude and common decency and come to me

in the first place, and unless I am mistaken, unless I am very much mistaken, she realizes it now." And my mother smiled meaningly. "I will not say," continued my mother, "that I knew all along and felt it in my bones, that she would come to this; I will not say that as long ago as when Sumner was cutting his first tooth, the one," she said, leaning toward me and pressing back my lip with her spoon, "the one that came there, in front—you lost it, dear, on the edge of the rain barrel—I constantly dreamed of white horses, with flowing tails, trampling upon someone, and that I beat them off with whips, compelling them to desist. My interpretation of that dream," said my mother, looking round, "has always been that those horses represented Society, and that the person they were trampling represented Mrs. Walpole. My rescue of her, under these circumstances, is too significant to require explanation. I do not think it requires any extraordinary perception to understand that Sumner's invitation to come to Swampscott is Mrs. Walpole's first card."

The sudden tinkling of the little bell over the shop door, announcing the entrance of a customer, prevented my mother from following up Mrs. Walpole's play, and caused my father hastily to brush the toast crumbs from his lap and hurry into the shop, where we heard his respectfully pitched voice, a moment later, saying, blandly, "Pepys, sir? Certainly, sir, step this way, please. I have a Pepys here, sir, that is as nearly unexpurgated as any edition extant!"

## CHAPTER III

### THE STREET-FLOOR LODGER

**T**HE street-floor of our house was occupied by an attorney who had his office there, and was visible daytimes from nine o'clock until four, but whose place of residence was a mystery to the other lodgers that only deepened with time. Every day at quarter to one his door was locked, and a small card stuck in the dingy glass panel announced that Mr. Barnard Hynson had gone to lunch and would return at two; but he was never seen to go out at the former nor return at the latter hour. Although I discovered the reason for this singular fact, when, imitating the feats of Blondin one day by walking on the top rail of the iron balcony that jutted out from his window, when he was supposed to have gone to lunch, I saw him through the window, behind the fire screen, eating sandwiches out of a paper bag and drinking milk from a bottle, I was too young to appreciate the significance of it.

Mr. Hynson was a small, huddled little man, with a tall, square forehead that was such a blank surface, and so obtruded itself upon the notice, that it seemed as if that space had been intended for his face, and his dwarfish features had somehow got misplaced too far down. He had scanty, light hair that seemed rather to hover over his head and accompany it when it moved than to belong to it, or be attached to it, so tremulous was the motion imparted to it by his every movement. A little bunch of whisker stood out in front of each ear, with such a palpable appearance of not belonging there, that it seemed to have been forced out on him by some violent pressure that required a vent,

as if some person had throttled him, and it would go in again as soon as that person let go. He encased his skinny neck in a high wall of collar tied round with a wisp of black tie, and the rest of his body in a suit of dead black that never displayed any loose or flapping parts, and appeared to be a part of his natural integument, in the fashioning of which nature had displayed in the extreme her propensity to waste nothing. The observer might wonder whether, if this figure walked out in a high wind, that boisterous element would find anything about it to ruffle up and stream out in its sportive way, or would play against it in vain as against a mere stick painted black, with never a splinter left unplanned.

The attorney was comparatively a recent tenant in the house and from the first had aroused a lively curiosity there. He paid little attention to his neighbors but always spoke to my father when he passed our steps, or to me, if we were visible in the shop. He did not appear to do much business, never had any callers, and spent most of his time sitting at his table by the window tapping his chin with a ruler.

One sunny afternoon I was sitting astride the railing in front of the shop, observing the busy traffic of the street, and wondering where so many people were going and what they had to do there, when Mr. Hynson called to me from his open window.

"Boy!"

I looked up.

"My compliments—Mr. Hynson's compliments—to your father and will he send me up *Greenleaf on Evidence*?"

"On what, sir?" I asked innocently.

"On *Evidence*; *Greenleaf's Commentaries on the Law of Evidence*; he will understand. I want to borrow it."

I had thought it was some salad dish. I ran into the shop and delivered the message to my father, who, anticipating, I suppose, some immensely profitable connection from

this advance of the attorney, immediately looked out the volume from his shelves and sent me up with it with his compliments. Mr. Hynson's door was open when I came up, and I walked into his office. It was a dirty little room with an ink-spattered table before the window, a cracked hand-basin on a rickety stand in the corner, and the fire-screen I had seen before in front of a blackened fireplace. Mr. Hynson sat at the table paring his nails.

"Here's the book, sir," I said, advancing to the table and laying it before him. "Father's compliments."

"All right," he said.

I waited for him to say something more but he didn't. With the diffidence of childhood I didn't know whether he expected me to go or stay, so I stood where I was, with ever-increasing embarrassment, and looked at him, and at the ceiling, and out of the window. He continued his occupation of paring his nails and did not look up; did not even touch the book I had placed on the table. In this situation I felt that it was incumbent upon someone to make some conversation, and as he had no apparent intention of doing so I essayed it myself.

"Do you keep a cat?" I asked.

"No," he said.

It was decisive and it was discouraging, and I must have given up right there had I not been possessed of an obstinate idea that the situation must be retrieved somehow, so, after a short pause, I tried again.

"Do you keep a dog?" I asked.

"No," he said, with the same hopeless brevity.

I certainly had not improved matters. If it had been difficult before to walk out at the door it certainly was not easier now, after two failures of this sort. I was too deeply committed now, however, to give much thought to the further chances of success along this conversational line, and asked desperately:

"Do you keep a pony?"



"No," he said, exactly as before.

"Well then," I said, as if the object of my visit had been accomplished by these inquiries, "I believe I'll be going now."

"All right," he said, without looking up. And I went, very much relieved to get away.

From this time Mr. Hynson continued to borrow books from the shop constantly. At first he borrowed law books only, and would send down two or three times a day for *Coke upon Littleton*, or *Story* or the *Law Reports* for a particular year, which my father always sent up with his compliments, and displayed as much interest in looking them up and dusting them off, as though our neighbor were buying them and paying the highest prices. It was my father's opinion that the attorney was getting up some great case, and had sought out our neighborhood for quiet, and that when it was completed he would doubtless do something handsome for us. After a while, however, Mr. Hynson's taste changed, and he began to go in for history, science, biography, and even fiction, borrowing these works at the rate of two or more a day and always returning one before he took another. It seemed impossible that he could read all these books in the short time he kept them.

This singular intercourse had gone on a month, perhaps, without our acquaintance with the attorney progressing in any other way, when my father seized the occasion of encountering him one day in front of the shop, to invite him in. "It is the custom of a few of my intimates," he explained, "—er—familiar spirits, I may say, to gather informally in the shop of an evening to discuss the progress of events in—er—Art, Literature, and Politics. We should be pleased to hear your voice in our little Senate, sir." Mr. Hynson had expressed himself as delighted, and nearly every evening after that found him seated in our shop, a little back from the more intimate circle, huddled in his chair with his overweighted forehead inclined slightly forward, as

if it were about to pull him out of his chair, listening to the talk but not often joining in it. When he did, the conversation often found odd subjects, though it would be hard to say that this was from any suggestions of his.

One night when he was there, and there were also present Mr. Mungiven, the engraver from the second floor, Mr. Jelleff, the repairing jeweler who had half the front window and a bench in the other side of the sub-story, corresponding with our shop, and Mr. Falls, the upholsterer, joint tenant with him, the talk had turned on the sensational escape, a few days before, of a prisoner from the Charlestown prison, and the chances of his recapture.

"It stands to reason," said Mr. Falls, a dusty little man with iron spectacles and bushy whiskers, "that he'll be taken. He hadn't above an hour's start; he had his prison dress on, and so far as known, he had no money and no friends hereabouts to hide him. He'll be taken sure."

A general murmur corroborated this opinion. "Unless," said Mr. Mungiven, to whom a sudden thought had occurred, "unless he blackens his face and stains his clothes with mulberry juice." This stratagem being instantly voted inadmissible, Mr. Mungiven at once became an object of great unpopularity, and retired into a corner to turn it over in his own mind.

"The present highly perfected methods of police communication," observed Mr. Jelleff, seeming to enjoy putting it that way, "make it next to impossible for a crim'nal to disappear. The minute he dives under water," he continued, describing a swift arc in the air with his arm to counterfeit that action, "they is somebody a-watchin' for him to pop out. For a man *can't* stay under water always," said Mr. Jelleff argumentatively, "he can work a-l-o-n-g and w-o-r-k a-l-o-n-g under ground," he continued, with slightly mixed metaphor, passing his arm slowly through the air and scratching with his extended fingers, to represent the progress of the underground worker, "and be safe, but the

minute he shows his head," here he shot his arm up as if to take a view, "slap! They have him!" Mr. Jelleff leaned back in his chair and looked around for approval.

"I subscribe to that opinion," said my father, "and would even extend the scope of it. Not only is the known criminal unable to hide himself where the arm of the law cannot reach him, but, I believe it to be true, that even the crimes of non-professional criminals—er—if I may so distinguish between wrongdoers, seldom go undiscovered or their perpetrators unpunished. Our—er—jurisprudence is perhaps the highest developed function of government. Is not that your experience, Mr. Hynson?"

Mr. Hynson slowly unwound his long fingers, which were entwined and buried in his lap, and adjusted his cuffs with a stealthy, furtive movement, as if that act were a misdemeanor.

"I can not say, Mr. Bibbus," he said, in a low, suppressed kind of voice, a voice that seemed to be speaking inside of him, and to be accompanied by so little movement of the lips and so little expression of the face and forehead, that they seemed to challenge the observer to prove that *they* were responsible for it, "I can not say that experience in the law is likely to lead one to any conclusion upon that point—any unalterable conclusion. True, crimes are being continually brought to light, but when examined these prove usually to be of the grosser, less subtle sort and the hardest to conceal; murder, violent robbery, fraud. These crimes must always leave evidence; the murderer can rarely do away with the body of his victim; the robbed person remains to make his complaint; frauds almost always reveal themselves. These crimes, therefore, are bound to be discovered, and when discovered almost always indicate the guilty ones. So far, your opinion is justified. But I believe a conclusion from these premises, that the majority of crimes are ferreted out by the law, and their perpetrators punished, would be hasty. You must take account of the vast number

of crimes which, from their nature, are not discoverable by evidence—which leave no evidence; whose results are manifested, perhaps, after a long lapse of time and at great distances, and where the only remedy lies in civil action, in which, of course, the State is not a mover; conspiracies, testamentary frauds, torts of various kinds, all criminal, in intent. Many of these never come to light. You would be astonished, Mr. Bibbus,” continued the attorney, raising his eyes to my father’s face, “if you were aware of the extent of the frauds practiced under wills alone.” He seemed to utter the word wills, with a greedy relish; certainly his voice was almost hollow as he spoke it.

Speaking of wills, Mr. Falls was reminded that he once newly upholstered some furniture that had belonged to an old lady, who was immensely rich and died intestate, and that he had not been without hope of finding her will in the chair stuffing, but didn’t.

“Indeed!” said Mr. Hynson, eying him with new interest, “How long ago might that be?”

Mr. Falls thought it might be about thirty year.

“I’ll bet you didn’t look in the sofy!” cried Mr. Mungiven, with sudden triumph, from his corner.

“I *did* look in the sofy,” retorted Mr. Falls, indignantly. (Mr. Mungiven much cast down.)

If the attorney had had any notion of asking where those chairs might be now, he changed his mind, and again addressed my father: “The majority of wills,” he said, “are unjust to someone and are a constant source of litigation. I don’t suppose the will was ever made,” he continued, looking round and softly rubbing his hands together, “that couldn’t be broken. Testators make this easy by embodying their animosities in their testaments; they will never learn better. Stranger than this even, are the unaccountable reasons which induce testators to alter their wills and often to make new ones, after everyone supposes their affairs to be settled. No man can be trusted upon the subject of his

will. I have known testators," said Mr. Hynson, with a slight wave of his hand, to imply that the particulars of their description and abode were not pertinent for present purposes, "I have known testators—served them in a professional capacity—who have drawn wills, witnessed them by their business associates, and deposited them in custody, with solemn assurances that they had settled their affairs beyond the possibility of a change, and then," pursued Mr. Hynson, again singling out my father and making deliberate thrusts at him with his bony forefinger, "and then have drawn wills secretly a week later, attested them by the coachman, and hidden them in the wall! Such," concluded Mr. Hynson, again burying his hands in his lap, "such are the inconsistencies of persons who have property to bequeath. I would not, were I an heir, accept any will as genuine unless I had seen it drawn by the testator, five minutes before he expired!"

Mr. Jelleff thought if he had a large property to leave he would turn it all into cash—preferably twenty-dollar gold pieces—and distribute them equally among the beneficiaries, whom he would summon round his death-bed for that purpose.

Mr. Hynson paid less attention on these occasions to our neighbors who might be present than he did to my father, and even less attention to my father, it sometimes seemed to me, than he did to the shop. From where he sat his eyes continually traveled round the room, resting on the shelves and peering back of the counters, in a restless, curious manner. I supposed he was looking for some book he had not yet borrowed. Another tendency he showed was to outstay everyone else of an evening; a difficult matter, as they were all late sitters, and Mr. Jelleff was certainly the slowest speaking man I ever heard, the most ponderous of gesture and the most deliberate of thought. Yet, he was successful on at least one occasion in getting rid of the company before he went himself. Mr. Jelleff had consumed about an hour

and a quarter this evening, in developing his views upon the subject of foreign immigration, the gist of which appeared to be that he didn't like foreigners, their ways or their manners; although, he said, he did not represent himself as an authority upon the question, "in any sense of the word." Mr. Hynson had listened with ill-concealed impatience to the exposition of these views, and as soon as he had an opportunity, asked quietly, in his even, passionless voice, like a voice in a tube:

"Have you ever been abroad?"

"Meaning," inquired Mr. Jelleff, "to Europe?"

"Europe, yes; or Asia, or Africa."

For answer Mr. Jelleff straightened himself up in his chair, and pointing with his arm in a direction generally upward—which he did not particularly notice, in his endeavor to fix Mr. Hynson impressively with his eye at the same time—said: "Do you know what lies yonder?"

"Yes," replied the attorney, "Bunker Hill Monument; I've been to the top; what about it?"

"I p'inted," said Mr. Jelleff, speaking very distinctly, but lowering his arm a little, "I p'inted, sir, in a geographical direction, not in a—a"—Mr. Jelleff paused and cast about for the proper word—"not in a altitudinal direction. Perhaps you are aweer, sir, and perhaps you are not aweer that Somerville lies in the direction I p'inted?"

"I believe it does," replied Mr. Hynson.

"You believe it does," repeated Mr. Jelleff, who, finding himself in an argument with a lawyer, thought it necessary to adopt a legal, badgering manner, "you believe it does; don't you know it does?"

"No," said the attorney, coolly, "I don't. I never saw the place and I couldn't undertake to say it was there."

Although taken somewhat aback by this reply, and seeing his triumph deferred, Mr. Jelleff invited us, out of the corner of his eye, but without for an instant releasing Mr. Hynson, to observe closely if we wanted to see an attorney floored.

"I was born there," he said, slowly and impressively, "and in the forty-eight year sence—forty-nine, come the third of September—I have never been further away from there than where I am now at this present moment!" and Mr. Jelleff struck the chair he was sitting in to indicate the spot. "Does that answer your question, sir?"

"Perfectly," replied Mr. Hynson, "I apprehended as much."

"You apprehended as much," repeated Mr. Jelleff, still with his jury manner, "perhaps you'll be good enough to explain what you mean by *that*." And Mr. Jelleff folded his arms and wagged his head, in a manner that expressed his conviction that the attorney would find himself in rather deep water presently.

"Certainly," replied Mr. Hynson; "whenever you see a man more bigoted than the most bigoted of ordinary bigots, more ignorant, more blatant, and more generally an ass, it is safe to assume that that man knows nothing more of the world than can be learned at no greater distance from where he was born than you are now from Somerville."

Without quite following the oblique manner of this thrust Mr. Jelleff understood that it reached home, and it was too much for his philosophy. Rising with great dignity he stalked to the door, and pausing there only to cast a withering look at his opponent, which screwed his eyes up in his head until they wholly disappeared, as the recoil of a ship's own broadside will sometime submerge her, he went out, and to the best of my belief didn't come back for a month. The remaining company soon bade us good-night and followed, Mr. Mungiven observing, with an engaging smile, as he rose to go, that he hoped to have the pleasure another time.

"A literary man like yourself," said Mr. Hynson to my father, when they were gone, "a university man if I am not mistaken—no?—you *surprise* me! your conversation had certainly given me that impression." My father coughed.

"A man of your tastes must find the intellectual environment here rather discouraging!"

"They mean well," replied my father, with a wave of his hand, "our neighbors mean well. Circumstances have not perhaps accorded them opportunities 'for the—er—cultivation, as you say, of the refinements of—er—Art, and Literature, or for the clarified intellectual vision such as is acquired in our—er—I mean your, profession, but they mean well, they mean well."

"Aside from associations of this kind," pursued the attorney, with a glance at the shelves, "your surroundings here could not be more congenial."

"Ah!" returned my father, with a pleased expression, "you are right, Mr. Hynson. These are friends indeed! Cæsar looks down from his place yonder beckoning me into Gaul, while Homer, Virgil, and Euripides——"

"Exactly," interposed the attorney, not waiting for the completion of my father's eulogy of the classics, "the ancients are well represented, and, if I mistake not, the law occupies no small space in your collection."

My father assented with a wave of his hand.

"From which I infer," continued the attorney, "that it was your intention originally to confine your business wholly to the purchase and sale of law books?"

"No!" replied my father, "I can't say that it was. No, that was not the way of it; the books came into my possession, you see,—er—collectively; I did not select them."

"Oh!" returned Mr. Hynson, "I understand, a legacy; a relative, I presume; quite so."

"No," again replied my father, politely inclining his head as if to assure his visitor that he was very sorry to correct him again, "no, not a relative; not a relative of mine. My wife's."

"Pardon me," said the attorney, "I understand now. He was a lawyer, surely."



"No," said my father, with another polite inclination of the head, "he was a merchant."

"Indeed!" replied Mr. Hynson, raising his eyebrows, "that is strange. One would infer that none but a lawyer would stock his library with books of that description. Doubtless he acquired them merely as a fancy."

"Well," replied my father, "I don't rightly know. He had some queer notions, I believe. He was a man of property and I have understood entertained a deep distrust of lawyers, and it was said had refused to allow one to draw his will. I have heard that he purchased all these law books to qualify himself to make his own will—one that couldn't be broken. It was merely gossip, for as a matter of fact he left a will regularly drawn by a lawyer, and under it my wife received his library."

"Which included," said Mr. Hynson, nodding his head, "all his law books; exactly."

"All his law books," assented my father, "and quite a numerous collection of scientific works, history, biography and travel. Quite a respectable library and very little used."

"Then Mr. Sumner—I believe you said his name was Sumner," said the attorney, checking himself with some confusion, I thought.

"Did I?" said my father, with a surprised look, "I don't think—but perhaps I did; I must have done so—yes, that was his name—Richard Sumner."

"Then Mr. Sumner was not a reading man," pursued Mr. Hynson, with his former composure, "didn't use his library much, eh?"

"Oh, indeed, it was as good as new, I assure you," said my father, "many of the books appeared not to have been opened. I was able to get publisher's price for nearly all the law books, all that I have sold."

"Then you did sell them!" said the attorney, quickly.

My father regarded him with surprise. "Why, certainly,"

he said, "I sold what I could; they were the—er—nucleus of my stock in trade."

"To be sure, to be sure," assented the attorney, hastily. "I—ah—I thought perhaps that being—ah—a family bequest—ah—as you may say——"

My father laughed and gave the top of his head a rub. "We didn't allow sentiment to interfere with business," he said, "not in this case. We weren't favorites; in fact we were never able to figure out how it happened that we came in for anything at all. No, we disposed of our legacy willingly enough. I believe," said my father, with another laugh, and glancing at the parlor door, "I believe my wife did want to reserve one book, one that he had apparently made some use of—she has her woman's notions—as a sort of memento of him, but it went like the others. I would have been glad to have kept it," continued my father more gravely, "in compliance with her wish, but we had an inquiry for it and trade was very bad, very bad. If you will believe me, Mr. Hynson, nothing but a copy of *Pamela* had gone out of this shop for a week. It is a fact, sir," said my father, shaking his head, "I didn't know at one time but it was a case of," my father opened his mouth very wide and closed it emphatically on one syllable, "Sum—" and then opened it again to let the other out,—"*mash!* a case of sum-*mash!* But *Pamela* saved us, *Pamela* pulled us through that time."

"Indeed!" returned Mr. Hynson, "that *was* close. And to have to dispose of a family heirloom, the testator's favorite book of poems, did you say?——"

"No, no," said my father, "it was not so bad as that; it was a law book merely, like the others. But he had written his name in it and made some marginal notes; in fact it was the only book in his library that he had apparently used at all, and—I beg your pardon, Mr. Hynson, did you hear anything?"

The attorney had started suddenly and half risen from his chair. "No, no!" he said, sinking back in his seat and

passing his hand over his face, "I—I must have dozed, I think, a—a weakness of mine, I really beg your pardon. This book you were saying was——"

"Merely a law book; Maine's *Early Institutions*, I believe it was called," returned my father; "there is such a work?"

"Oh, yes," replied Mr. Hynson, "it is well known; quite the most valuable work, I believe, in recent years on the origin of private tenure in property."

"Yes, that was the work," said my father, "I remember it perfectly; it had then been issued only a short time and I got a very good price for it."

"Very interesting, very interesting indeed," said Mr. Hynson, rising, "but I must not keep you up any longer. I really fear I have kept you out of bed."

"Not at all," said my father, politely.

But the attorney was already at the door, letting himself out. Indeed, he was in such a hurry that he returned my father's good-night from the other side of it—if he returned it at all.

"A most remarkable man," said my father to me, as we put out the lights in the shop. "I dare say that he knows more law—well, than he does manners, anyway." And I, remembering my first visit to his office, agreed with him.

A few mornings after, my father was reading his paper at breakfast when he suddenly looked up from it. "Hulloa!" he exclaimed, "here's somebody advertising for copies of the first edition of Maine's *Early History of Institutions*. Now, what in the name of Blackstone," said he, putting down his paper and breaking his roll, "do you suppose anyone wants with those!"

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## CHAPTER IV

### I MEET THE ENEMY AND I AM HIS

SATURDAY seemed a long way off until I went to bed on Friday night, when it suddenly seemed terribly near. Mr. Walpole was to call for me in the afternoon, but the forward state of preparations for his coming would have indicated his expected arrival before breakfast. Certainly much unnecessary confusion would have been avoided if my mother had not dressed and starched me quite so early, and then experienced hourly doubts during the rest of the day respecting the wisdom of substituting corduroys for my linen trousers and a red neck-scarf for my blue one. This Sunday regalia made the day doubly long for me, since the impropriety of indulging in any sort of exertion, recreative or otherwise, was too manifest even to require the inevitable admonitions of my mother not to go into the street, or to put my hands in my pockets, or to lean against anything in my new pleated jacket.

This situation exercised over my mind a domination that hourly tended to unfit me for the culminating event when it should come. I felt my courage slowly dwindling, until the inspiration to succumb to a sudden attack of illness, which had before occurred to me as a measure to be adopted in case I should want to come home before the natural expiration of my visit, now presented itself to me as feasible for immediate service. A carpet-bag, containing my effects, completely strapped and deposited near the door, and the disquieting actions of my father, who rubbed his head a good deal and shook it, and clasped his hands behind him and paced the shop, and clasped them in front of him and

pondered, and thrust them into his pockets and whistled, were visual appearances not calculated to heighten joyful anticipations of my departure. Indeed, I think the strapping of that carpet-bag gave me the final realizing shock that I was face to face with the crisis. Until then the matter had seemed open to discussion, a thing in the future and not yet upon me at any rate; but the sight of that bag, closed and looking dreadfully businesslike, brought the seriousness of the thing right home to me. I avoided it and went into the parlor, where even Cæsar was less terrible.

I suppose if I could have had any idea of Mr. Walpole's appearance or the manner of his arrival; whether he was a short man or a tall one, or would come in a cab or on foot, or for that matter in a balloon, the suspense would have been less painful. As it was, I was subjected to a succession of false alarms that brought me to the verge of collapse. Every wheeled vehicle that stopped in the neighborhood of the shop door, brought my heart into my mouth, and every tinkle of the shop bell sent me scurrying from whatever post of observation I happened to be occupying, into my bed-closet, to take my preconcerted station behind the door, where I would have the moral support of my every-day clothes hanging on the wall. The several customers who found their way in at the door that day, and presented to me about every type of physiognomy but what I had pictured Mr. Walpole's own to be, must have wondered at the effect of their entrance upon me, whose furtive inspection of them from behind columns, followed by precipitate dives through the rear door, must have induced the strongest suspicions of my overpowering sense of guilt and imminent fear of apprehension.

As it happened, I had had so many false starts that I was thrown off my guard, and when, returning incautiously from my last flight to cover, I ran into a white-mustached, buttoned-up gentleman, who had just stepped briskly in at the door and who tapped me smartly on the head with his glove

and asked for my father, I was so self-possessed in my utter unsuspicion that this could be the man, that I was able to receive his inquiry in a manner less indicative of imbecility than I could have hoped for under the circumstances. Not until my father stepped into the shop and saluted him by his name did it dawn upon me that my ordeal had come and gone without my knowing it. My father immediately conducted Mr. Walpole into the parlor, where my mother (in a cap which I had never seen before and which would have been becoming if she had had it on straight, received him graciously, and where I was officially presented to him by having my finger dragged out of my mouth, my jacket pulled violently down in the back, and my chin tilted up in front.

Mr. Walpole was a tall, good-looking man of fifty, I guessed, with grizzled, close-cut hair and a white mustache. His heavy mustache gave the lower part of his face something of a grim look, but the expression of his eyes was kindly, and when he smiled his mustache parted in the middle and revealed a humorous mouth and a set of even, white teeth. These swift observations gave me intense relief, and when he took me by the shoulder and gave me a sort of friendly shake I felt at home with him in a minute, and the uneasy qualms at my stomach ceased.

"So," said Mr. Walpole, seating himself and folding the tails of his coat over his knees, "this is our young man, eh? How old do you make him, ma'am?"

My mother made me ten years, and would have made me months, weeks, and days if he had waited, but he didn't.

"Ten, eh? Well, Harold beats you, there; he's nearly twelve and rather larger, but Lord! what a team you'll make! Any schooling?"

"Sumner's instruction," answered my father, clasping his fingers across his breast in his familiar way, and revolving his thumbs comfortably, "I have so far taken upon myself; and while he is now approaching an age that will soon

require his studies to be directed by—er—abler minds, I believe he is fairly well on in his rudiments,—er—fairly well on.”

“Just so,” said Mr. Walpole, with an attentive glance at my father, “just so. Well, there’s plenty of time. Do you like books, eh?” he said, turning to me,—“like to read stories?”

“Yes, sir,” I replied, “I like some books, but I don’t like those,” and pointed to the *Commentaries* over his head.

Mr. Walpole turned in his seat and followed the direction of my finger. “Eh?” he said, “what are those?”

“Caesar’s *Commentaries*,” answered my father, with pride, “he has not yet learned to appreciate that author, but he will in time, he will in time.”

“What!” said Mr. Walpole, opening his eyes rather wide, “does the boy read Caesar!”

“No, sir,” I explained, “I mean I don’t like the *looks* of them; they’ve horsehair covers and I don’t like horsehair. We have it on the chairs and it tickles your legs; and then I’ve *got* to read them sometime,” I added, giving the first reason last.

“Hah!” said Mr. Walpole, contemplating the *Commentaries* with a critical eye, “fancy, boy; only fancy. But you *like* to read,” he went on, “you’re fond of books?” His manner was almost anxious.

“He’s always at it,” interposed my mother, smoothing down her dress and starting to rock in her chair, finding herself under way, “he’s always got his nose in a book; and while I can not say he displays the taste for poetry I could have wished to see, I believe his reading is generally well-selected. His liking for history he gets from his father, who has been a close student of that branch of learning, especially, I may say, of the history of the Romans, with which he is as familiar,” said my mother, looking round, “as I am with—with this wall paper (don’t rub your head on it, Sumner). Travels, exploration, and adventure,” con-

tinued my mother, as if she were a phrenologist feeling my bumps, "also interest him deeply, and this taste, I need not say, he inherits from his Uncle Sumner, who while he did not himself visit foreign lands, traded in many of them, which is the same thing. For romance he has acquired a taste of his own, for neither his father nor myself was ever much given to fiction, though when a young girl I copied a large part of the *Vicar of Wakefield* as a writing exercise, and as for his Uncle Sumner, he considered all works of fiction immoral. In poetry alone I find his taste deficient, and this is the more remarkable as I have always been devoted to it. I have a volume of poetry now," said my mother, and I knew she was coming to it, "compiled from many excellent sources, which would never go out of my hand if other demands on my time and attention did not forbid."

"Good!" said Mr. Walpole, "I'm glad he's fond of books. Harold isn't; he'll let anyone read aloud to him, but he won't read for himself. I don't suppose he'd ever get through a book without Starbright's help. But baseball, Lord! *and* fishing! I'll engage he can show you something there! We'll have to make a bargain, you and I; you'll read to him, eh? and get him up on those Romans, and he'll show you every fishing-ground between Marblehead and Nahant! Eh? What do you say to that?"

"If Mr. Starbright——" I began.

Mr. Walpole laughed gayly, and slapped both his knees. "Lord!" he said, "that's good, too! Starbright is my daughter, boy. You wouldn't think it, eh? Well, that's *not* her name exactly, not exactly, though I call her by it. Stella Walpole," and his eyes kindled as he spoke, and he pulled me between his knees and held me there, "will always be Starbright to her father." Standing close to him I saw how his handsome face softened, and the hands which he rested on my shoulders trembled for a moment, ever so slightly.

"I *will* read to him!" I cried eagerly, trembling myself



under his kind touch, "if he'll let me. And I know stories about Cincinnatus, and Marius, and the Sybilline Books—but I don't think it is true about the woman burning them that way," I added, anxious lest he should accept me as sponsor for legend. "Do you think he would care to hear them, too?"

"Would he!" cried Mr. Walpole, holding me away the length of his arms and gazing at me with delight, "Lord! but you've hit the very thing! That's just what I want; you couldn't please me more. Now, it's a curious thing," he continued, turning to my father and releasing me with one hand to pull at his mustache, "but Harold, though as bright a lad as you would care to see out of his books, takes to study slowly; there's no gainsaying that, he takes to it slowly." Mr. Walpole confirmed his own opinion by a reluctant shake of his head. "Now, here's young Sumner just the opposite. He likes books, he likes to study; and he's an imaginative, story-telling youngster. That's the trouble with Harold, he has no imagination. Our young man here is just the companion for him; he'll bring him out, eh? It couldn't be better."

My parents both received these remarks with unmistakable gratification, my father as conveying indirectly a compliment to his instruction, and my mother as confirming her opinion of Mrs. Walpole's play.

"I'm sure," said my father, complacently, "we've done our best with Sumner. I believe he *is* imaginative; yes, I think I may say without bias that he is that, anyway." My father spoke as though he had given special attention to the development and training of my imaginative faculties and was glad to see the result recognized, though I don't suppose he had ever thought of it before in his life.

"What I assume to be the value of a highly cultivated imagination," observed my mother, seeing another opening, "is the advantage that accrues thereby of poetic intuition. Sumner, with his imagination, should have the poetic tem-

perament in a far greater degree than he has. He gets his imagination both from his father and me. His Uncle Sumner was not imaginative, and even considered it a form of insanity. I do not know how near right he may have been; I know I have imagined things, which, if they had proved to be real, would have driven *me* insane. I used often to imagine Sumner had fallen from that iron balcony over the window, and I have asked you, time and time again, Bermondsey," said my mother, reproachfully, "to speak to the landlord and have it removed. But no, you will not, and sometime, when it is too late, you will remember my words."

"I agree with you, ma'am," said Mr. Walpole, politely. "A boy should have some imagination; it will help him through the world and enable him to look more hopefully and cheerfully upon life. It is a good thing to be practical, but it can be overdone; in the extreme it is a fault. Mr. Sumner, as you say, had that fault, if any."

I could see that the conversation was likely to verge toward a topic that would bring on my father's cough presently. Already premonitory symptoms had not been wanting, as of the slightly impatient scraping of his chin with his hand and the alternate throwing of his right leg over his left and his left over his right. Perhaps Mr. Walpole noticed something of this, for he now rose briskly and took out his watch. With that in hand he seemed to recall something further. "Mrs. Walpole," he said, turning to my mother, who instantly became rigid, "intrusted to me, ma'am, her compliments to you, and expressed her regret that her unfortunate infirmity denied her the pleasure of seeing *you* at Swampscott."

My mother bowed the same size of bow she considered Mrs. Walpole would have bowed, had their positions been reversed.

"Mrs. Walpole's condition does not, unhappily, improve;" Mr. Walpole looked at his watch perplexedly and shook

his head, "the state of her nerves is at times,"—he snapped down the case and returned his watch to his pocket—"oh, dear me, quite dreadful!"

My father, whom long experience had rendered peculiarly adept in the discerning of unpromising signs, considered the aspect of affairs at this juncture to demand an immediate diversion. He therefore seized me, and began hastily to button up my jacket and crowd into my pockets certain articles that had been left on the table to invest me with at the last moment, to wit, an orange, a piece of gingerbread, a clean handkerchief (which I had been instructed not to unfold until necessary), a small placard bearing my name and home address, for purposes of identification in case of wreck, which my mother thought rather certain, and a pocket album, in which I designed to have my anticipated acquaintances inscribe their names with what poetic sentiments they might be seized.

"There!" cried my father, "you're ready at any rate (if the orange hurts you, take it out)."

"And so am I," said Mr. Walpole, briskly, holding out his hand to my mother, "so we'll be jogging. Happy to have conversed with you, ma'am. Mr. Bibbus, good-day. Be assured, both of you, that Sumner will be well cared for and made to enjoy himself. Harold and Starbright are both a-tiptoe to welcome him. Don't feel the least bit anxious; we'll look out for him; eh, Sumner, boy?"

I flew into my mother's arms for a last wild hug and set my teeth on my tears. I felt that to cry would be a poor kind of answer to this cheery assurance of Mr. Walpole's, and would show a want of confidence in him that my pride would not allow. So after a brief moment with my face on my mother's shoulder, I felt that I had conquered and turned to take my father's hand, which I shook in a manly fashion. "Good-bye, my boy," he said, "and have a good time, and when you come back," here he drew me to one side and dropped his voice confidentially, "I'll have the *Commentaries*

in English—without horsehair, if you prefer—so we can begin right away.”

Mr. Walpole took my bag (he must have been surprised at the weight of it; my mother had packed several quart bottles of spring bitters which my constitution was supposed to be in need of), and we all went out together to the street. I think if I had had a free hand at this last moment I would have knuckled my eyes, which were again blinking wet, but Mr. Walpole clasped one hand firmly in his, as we walked away, and in the other I held my piece of gingerbread, whose proportions and general stickiness had induced me to favor this public mode of transportation to pocketing it; so not being able to cry comfortably, I concluded I wouldn't do it at all.

As we looked back the last time to wave our farewells, Mr. Hynson came down his steps and stood talking to father. I suddenly felt Mr. Walpole's hand tighten over mine, and he stopped.

“Who is that man?” he asked, abruptly.

“That, sir, talking with my father? Oh, that is Mr. Hynson. His office is over our shop.”

“Hynson?” he repeated, thoughtfully. “I don't know the name, but—how long has he lived there?”

“He doesn't live there, sir,” I explained, “he lives—but I don't know where he lives. His office is there; he came last winter.”

“Hah!” said Mr. Walpole, moving on, “Hynson, eh? No, I don't know the name, but that face—hum—what does he do?”

“He is a lawyer, sir, but he hasn't any books; he borrows ours.” And then I added this information, “He doesn't keep a cat, nor a dog, nor a pony.”

My conductor looked down at me curiously. “No?” he said, with a smile, “well, I shouldn't wonder if you were right, I don't suppose he does. Now let's step out, or we'll miss our train.”

## CHAPTER V

### HAROLD PORTAL

WE crossed the river, where long lines of laden barges lay in tiers, reaching nearly from shore to shore, waiting to be unloaded, and I asked Mr. Walpole, remembering my mother's dissertations on the Oriental trade, if any of them came from China? He said no, they came mostly from Gloucester. A quarter of an hour's walk further brought us to the station, a big stone building with round towers at the corners, that reminded me of Torquillstone castle, and I dare say I could have found out the window where Rebecca watched and reported the assault to the wounded knight, if Mr. Walpole had not hurried me in and down a long platform, where our train stood waiting. It was my first experience aboard cars, and as we began to move and rolled out into the sunlight, a feeling of exultation came over me that expanded my young heart with something of the fierce emotions which change, and motion, and new life and freedom bring to him whose feet first touch the highway of the world. I am afraid, that for that moment, the bookshop and its quiet corner, my parents, the cave under the sidewalk, and the long shadow of the Monument, traveling in its lengthening orbit, were forgotten. The very rhythm of the car wheels, as we shot across trestles, and passed stone abutments which gave back a hollow roar, seemed to fall in with the refrain of my quickening thoughts: Clickety, click, ker chunk, ker chunk, I'm going away, away, away; Harold Por-tal, Por-tal, Por-tal, chug, chug, chug, chug, Star-bright, Star-bright, Star-bright, clickety click, ker chunk, ker chunk.

It is a tremendous experience. Wherever we stop, I gaze negligently from the window at what of small boys are congregated there, and appear indifferent to traveling. I essay a yawn, and am considerably confused when Mr. Walpole observes it and asks me if I want to go to sleep. I wouldn't go to sleep for any money. It is a marshy country, and we appear at times to be running into the ocean. I try to count the telegraph poles, which seem to whirl up to the window, bow, and flash by; it is tiring to the neck and I give it up. The conductor comes through with his punch and seems to know everyone, passes the time of day with Mr. Walpole as he takes our tickets, and says it is well-known that all small boys traveling on that line, have to have their ears punched. He feels for mine and I am very uncomfortable, but Mr. Walpole laughs and says it can be done later. The conductor agrees and passes on, shaking his punch at me to let me know he won't forget it. I secretly decide to come back some other way. The colored cord which swings over the aisle, suspended from the ceiling by straps and rings, has a fascination for me. I wonder what it is for and what would happen if I pulled it. I can't get it off my mind. Thinking of it, I become horribly frightened lest somebody should pull it, and the engineer should come back and ask me what I meant by it. At the end of the car is a water-cooler. Previous to noticing it I was not conscious of any desire to drink, but now a raging thirst seizes me. I try to overcome it but can't; it grows worse. I lay my gingerbread on the window sill and ask Mr. Walpole if I can get a drink? He lets me out into the aisle, and as I look down the car it appears a momentous undertaking to reach the end of it, but I start out, clutching people by the shoulders and bruising myself against seats, painfully conscious that everyone is looking at me. What if someone should speak to me and ask me why I don't go and sit down? I reach the water-cooler and can't get any water from it; the faucet won't work. I try it every way, but it refuses to yield. I

am not thirsty any more but I am ashamed to have it seen that I am baffled. So I stand in front of the cooler and pretend to draw water, raise the empty glass to my lips and start back, drying my mouth with my handkerchief.

We left the train at Lynn, where Mr. Walpole's carriage was waiting for us. It was a neat trap, painted red, and drawn by a pair of spirited horses (not the white ones of my mother's dream), and driven by a round, fat coachman, who talked to them familiarly all the way, but who did not address Mr. Walpole except to say at the start, with a sort of surly triumph, that he knowed he would miss the 2:10, along of young Heeltaps. The drive was a fine one and kept us in sight of the ocean all the way. I think I should have enjoyed it more if Mr. Walpole had not pointed out so many places to me, and told me things in connection with them, which he did in the kindest manner, but the effort required to remember all he said, as I felt bound to do under the uneasy suspicion that he might ask me to repeat it to him later, quite spoiled my pleasure. A sharp trot down a hard, white road that dipped toward the beach and skirted a sea wall in a long half-circle, brought us, in half an hour, to a wide stone gateway, through which we drove into some well-kept grounds, well back in which, and approached by a driveway that wound shadily among spreading trees, stood a square, comfortable-looking brick house, before which we stopped; and the coachman, as he descended, addressed his second remark to Mr. Walpole, as surlily triumphant as the first, to the effect that Nellie would have done it in four minutes less, if he had give her her mouth.

A wild scampering of feet on the gravel walk drew my attention at this instant, and there burst from around the side of the house a girl, with her hat hanging half-way down her back and her hair flying, running towards us, closely followed by a boy, both of whom made a scramble over the wheels before we could descend.

"Hold on there!" cried Mr. Walpole, laughing. "Catch!"

and he threw my bag to the boy, who caught it and held it though it nearly knocked him down. This diversion gave us a chance to get down, when the girl immediately clasped Mr. Walpole about the neck and kissed him a dozen times while the boy stood a little apart, grinning and rubbing his elbow; where my bitters struck him, I suppose.

"There—there—there! toll is paid!" cried Mr. Walpole returning his daughter's kisses and gayly disengaging himself from her embrace, "come and welcome your guests—Sumner, this is Starbright, and this is your cousin, Master Portal." Both shook hands with me, easily and naturally. The girl was of about my age, with black, lustrous hair, big brown eyes and ruddy cheeks, in which the dimples chased each other when she laughed. As we walked toward the house Harold came to my side, and I took hold of the bag, which we carried between us. He was, as Mr. Walpole had said, larger than I and was dressed rather mannishly. He had a round, good-natured face, not handsome, but amiable and likable, and a rather whimsical expression of the eyes and mouth that had the odd quality, I soon found, of remaining unchanged whether his mood was serious or jesting. He was freckled and his hair inclined to reddishness.

"Say," he said, as we went up the steps, "you live in Charlestown near the Monument, don't you?"

I told him, yes.

"Well, say, did you ever fly a kite from the top of it?"

I told him, no.

He looked a good deal surprised, and I felt in a moment that I had taken very little advantage of my proximity to the Monument all these years. He said no more till we were passing through the hall, when he turned and whispered, "Say, don't eat any of the cakes at tea, I have some up in my room." Without knowing what this arrangement might import, I whispered back, "All right," and we passed into the parlor.



Seated at the window overlooking the lawn, with her feet on a low foot rest, and looking extremely languid and used up, was a lady, who turned her eyes towards us as we entered, without moving her head.

"Randolph," she said, reproachfully, "I wonder at you, when you know the state of my nerves! How *can* you let the children stampede into the house as if it were a barracks? Positively, when I heard that door crash, I thought every nerve in my body would snap! Look, I am still all in a quiver now."

Mr. Walpole hurried across to her and bent over her affectionately. "I am sorry, Caroline," he said, touching his mustache to her forehead. "I cautioned the children not to make any noise" (which was not quite true), "but they are careless, I know. I have brought Master Bibbus, my dear. Come here, Sumner, this is Mrs. Walpole; she will be glad to welcome you."

I advanced and made my respectful bow, which I had rather to prolong while Mrs. Walpole fumbled with her eye-glasses and adjusted them on her nose.

"Ah," she said, "so you're the boy. Come a little nearer, please, and let's have a look at you."

I stepped up close to her, and bowing again, said I hoped she was pretty well.

"Oh, dear me!" she cried, letting her eye-glasses drop to her lap and making a weak gesture of protest with her jeweled hand, "don't refer to my health, whatever you do! There! You've set me all in a quiver again. Don't ever use that expression again unless you wish to make me suffer. Never, under any circumstances, refer to the health of an invalid, *to* that invalid. It is very ill-advised, physicians will tell you so."

Very much embarrassed at my blunder, I begged her pardon, and not knowing what to say, said what it would have been my turn to say if she had returned my inquiry, which was, that I was pretty well myself. I soon found that

although Mrs. Walpole interdicted any remarks from others upon the subject of her health, she had a good deal to say about it herself. Indeed, she began at once with me.

"I'm very glad to see you here, Master Bibbus," she said, "and I observe, what is very fortunate indeed for my nerves, that your mother parts your hair at the side. If there is anything that will bring my nerves to a tension, it is to see a person's hair parted in the middle. I have to be very careful of my nervous system; I have to keep a constant watch upon it. If there is anything the sight of which I know will bring my nerves to a tension, I have continually to be upon the lookout for that thing, to avoid it. Only by keeping my mind fixed upon my nervous system can I prevent it from being upset. When any matter, of whatever nature, comes up for consideration, I immediately ask myself, 'What will be the effect of this upon my nerves?' and upon the answer to that question, addressed inexorably to my own conscience, depends the further consideration of that matter, whatever it may be. Whatever it may be," repeated Mrs. Walpole, with a slight flutter of her eyelids, raising her voice a trifle, "whether it may be the reception here of guests, or the desirability of allowing a child—and that child a girl—to run wild like an Indian, without a hat and in the unrestricted company of another child, as scandalous in appearance and of the opposite sex!"

We all felt, I think, that we stood equally impeached by this oblique thrust. Starbright made one or two furtive attempts to smooth out her hair and adjust her dress, while Harold, after an inspection of his boots and hands, appeared to consider this description of himself hopeless of denial. Mr. Walpole was satisfied to say nothing, and withdrew to a table at the other side of the room, where he busied himself with some papers.

I was so conscious of being in an untenable position, with respect to originating any remark upon a subject of such delicacy, not to say danger, that it was some moments before

I gathered courage to murmur that, I thought it must be very painful.

"Painful!" repeated Mrs. Walpole, "I assure you that at times my breathing is rendered so difficult that the rattle of my breath has frequently alarmed Mr. Walpole in the next room. I believe you said that you have noticed it from the library, Randolph?"

"Eh?" said Mr. Walpole, looking up. "Did you speak, my dear?"

"I was just remarking to Master Bibbus, that my painful respiration has frequently been heard by you outside of the room."

"Eh? Oh, yes! To be sure, yes. Quite true, my dear. Most remarkable thing, Sumner—hum—most remarkable, and very distressing, I assure you."

"It is a fact," resumed Mrs. Walpole, receiving this corroboration with great complacency, "and Dr. Frazey has frequently remarked, in speaking of my case, that if I occupied a less commanding social position he would have me in the hospital for a clinic, without loss of time." Mrs. Walpole shook her head feelingly over the loss to medical science; shook it assertively over her commanding social position; shook it finally, encouragingly, to me, to invite my opinion on these things. Having none to offer, I shook mine also, conveying thereby equal commiseration for her pathological condition, deference to her social position, admiration for Dr. Frazey's professional wisdom, and regret for my own ignorance.

I was surprised when we started downstairs to tea, to see what a really fine figure Mrs. Walpole was. She was many years younger than her husband, and I might have thought her handsome but for a certain cold, haughty expression that sat on her features, which no softer expression ever wholly dissipated. Even when she smiled, her smile seemed rather to pass before her face than over it, and the hard, chiseled features shone through it plainly.

There was a neat-looking servant in attendance at tea, who Harold appeared to think was in a conspiracy to deprive him of jam, and in consequence of his remonstrances upon the subject, some passages occurred between them which tended to interrupt, more or less, a subject upon which Mrs. Walpole had chosen to let her husband know her mind.

"Mrs. Parvin's conduct at the Biddulphs' last night occasioned much unfavorable comment, I believe," said Mrs. Walpole, drinking her tea.

"In what way?" inquired Mr. Walpole, quietly.

"You know as well as I do, Randolph, that I refer to her conduct with Harry Princep. Everybody noticed it."

("It ain't your jam, you know"), growled Harold, in a low parenthesis.

"People will talk," returned Mr. Walpole, carelessly. "Princep is an old friend——"

"An old sweetheart," interposed Mrs. Walpole, sharply.

"Perhaps. And Mrs. Parvin is a widow, my dear. Where's the harm?"

("If it's too expensive to eat, stick it up where we can look at it"), said Harold, ironically.

"A widow, yes! (Harold be quiet.) And I should think the circumstances of her being a widow would be enough to keep her one, a *little while*."

("I suppose you think if I make myself sick *you'll* have to nurse me! Nice nurse *you'd* make!")

"Harold, *will* you be quiet! As if one husband shot up or mowed down or whatever you like to call it, wasn't enough for one woman! Pray what kind of violent death *does* she want?"

("I'd be afraid you'd poison me"), said Harold, still in a low growl.

"How is Sumner making out down there?" inquired Mr. Walpole, trying to evade the argument, "Maggie, see that he gets something to eat."

("Yes, Maggie, you needn't starve him, anyway!") muttered Harold in his tea-cup.

"It's not decent, I say," continued Mrs. Walpole. "If Captain Parvin had died properly in bed, under a doctor's care, she might allow herself some latitude. But with his bullet-riddled memory before her—at least, I don't mean his bullet-riddled memory, but the memory of his bullet-riddled body—her actions are perfectly scandalous."

"Really, Caroline," remonstrated Mr. Walpole, using his napkin, "you wrong Mrs. Parvin. Really, nothing in her conduct can justify such expressions, my dear, really!"

"Randolph, when I speak (which is not often), I believe I know what I am talking about. I flatter myself so far. I do not claim to be informed upon *all* subjects,—far from it—but when I choose to speak upon a subject upon which I am qualified *to* speak, I must decline to submit to being called an absolute fool by my own husband, in the present state of my nerves. Perhaps if I were stronger, I would submit to it; I could stand it without injury, except to my feelings, which I am willing should be trampled upon; but I can not consent to have my nerves brought to a tension, if I am to continue to discharge the duties of my house. The two things are not compatible. Of course, if it is your wish to install a housekeeper here, that is different. In that case, I can not plead the responsibility of the house affairs as an excuse to guard against nervous prostration, and you can bring my nerves to a tension with impunity, but so long as I *have* the responsibility of this house (however long, or however short a time, *that* may be) I can not permit it, Randolph, and I tell you once for all. Do not ask me."

"Pass Master Bibbus the biscuits, Maggie," said Mr. Walpole.

("Yes, Maggie, and when you pass 'em, take 'em round the other way, or *I* might get one"), said Harold, in a sarcastic aside.

"Mamma," said Starbright, briskly, "if we have a house-

keeper, *won't* she make Maggie put more caraway seeds in the cookies?"

"Child!" returned Mrs. Walpole, majestically, "pray do not obtrude caraway seeds upon a conversation which does not concern you. Though it is, I suppose, to be expected," she continued, turning to her husband, "that after the example set before her my own child should take part against me. I wonder, Randolph, how you can reconcile it to your conscience to teach our daughter to anticipate seeing her mother superseded in this house. Appealed against, on a question of caraway seeds!"

"Don't be ridiculous, Caroline," said Mr. Walpole, with some show of annoyance; "who ever heard of such a thing!"

"Ridiculous!" exclaimed Mrs. Walpole, straightening up in her chair; "ridiculous, did you say, Randolph? Is that the language you address to me before the children? Is that the way you inculcate respect for the position I occupy at this table? Have you forgotten the state of my nerves?" Mrs. Walpole suddenly remembered it herself and sank back in her chair. "Have you—Maggie," she broke off, faintly, "arrange the couch; I feel my weakness coming on."

I was very glad when tea was over. Although as hungry as a boy had a right to be, I had eaten sparingly, partly because of embarrassment at the trend of the conversation, which as an alien I had to pretend not to hear, and partly because Harold's indignant protests (although his mouth seemed to be full all the time) awakened my apprehensions lest he should consider that I was filling up at his expense. The three of us stole away as soon as Mrs. Walpole's withdrawal made escape possible, Harold congratulating Maggie as we passed out upon making the pie last through another day, and made our way through a side door to the porch, and thence to the lawn. Starbright recommended getting out of hearing of the house as quickly as possible, so we could say we had heard no recall should that

point arise, and the expediency of this precaution being at once recognized, we raced through the trees toward the beach. Although night had fallen, an early moon already topped the trees, and as we came out on the road the full expanse of the sea broke upon us, shimmering gloriously in the moonlight. We clambered over the breakwater to the rocks below, my conductors leading with a confidence that showed familiarity with the way, to the extreme point where they shelved precipitously into the water. Here we sat down together, and Harold pointed out to me the long neck of land that jutted out to our right, which he said was Nahant. Lying off the point of this was a small, dark object, which he said was Egg Rock. He said he supposed ten men could hold Egg Rock against 'most any number, unless artillery was brought against them. His plan, he said, would be to distribute his men among the boulders with repeating rifles, and pick off landing parties at long range. It would be impossible, he said, to effect a landing under fire of this sort, as the surf was always high and there was little or no beach. He was doubtful even if a battery, erected on Nahant, could dislodge the garrison, as its guns could only be brought to bear on the land side, and the defenders would have only to lie low and "let 'em rip." If other batteries should be erected at Marblehead, and perhaps somewhere on the opposite side of Nahant, say at Winthrop, and they could get the range so accurately as to cause shells to explode directly over the heads of the besieged, it might look bad for them, but no ricocheting fire was to be feared from any point.

"It would be a fine place for pirates," I observed.

"Ah!" returned Harold, with satisfaction, "I believe you! The only drawback is, there's no place to harbor a ship, or careen. You *could* careen, at a pinch, on Nahant Neck."

"You would have to have something to eat," said Starbright, reflectively.

"Eat!" retorted Harold, disdainfully, "why, we'd have a

stock of provisions there all the time, in caves and places. Every time we came back from a cruise, we'd bring a supply, wouldn't we? Why, we'd harry this coast for miles; we'd capture towns and lay 'em under tribute. Eat! Why, we'd live like lords, I guess!"

"Do you suppose there's any treasure buried there?" I hazarded.

"Well," said Harold, comfortably, "it's likely; like enough there's treasure all along this coast. Why, where'd be a prettier place to bury it than right here, where we're sitting? S'pose you put in here, after a rattling good cruise, with your hold full of doubloons, looking for a snug place to bury 'em. You'd anchor off that point there," he pointed to a small, sandy headland whose scarred front stood out ghost-like in the moonlight, a quarter of a mile away, and Star-bright and I nodded eagerly. "You'd let go your anchor there," continued Harold, quite in a rakish, sea-dog manner, that impressed me forcibly, "and you'd come ashore and overhaul this cove here, alow and aloft. There's a sandy beach yonder with a high woodland at the back; here's these rocks, above high water mostly, and the whole out of the tracks of ships; there's easy bearings to find it again, Nahant over there, Marblehead over there, Egg Rock in a straight line. Good! You go aboard and pipe all hands. 'My men,' says you, 'here's a pretty spot I've found, we'll lighten ship a bit; have up the doubloons.' You pack 'em in iron-bound cases, send 'em ashore and beach 'em, right down—there!" He picked up a stone, and considering a moment, tossed it down on the narrow spit of sand that wound round the base of our aërie. "You send your boat's crew up here and pass the treasure along to the top; you shift these rocks over with a capstan, dig down a bit, ease the boxes into the hole, shift the rocks back, and there you are. They'd stay there a thousand years!" Picking up another stone he stood up, and dropped it down a fissure in the ledge just below our feet.



Starbright and I both leaned forward and gazed down the crevice thus indicated as the probable repository of millions. The thing looked feasible, and Harold spoke with authority. I could see that Starbright was equally impressed and I found my respect for Harold growing. Not everyone could have figured it out with that certainty. Harold himself appeared to recognize the telling effect of his words, and to consider it complimentary. He leaned back on his elbow and contemplated the sea reflectively.

"Pirates never seem to get any good of their gold," said Starbright, tucking her feet under her in a comfortable attitude, "they always bury it somewhere and never come back for it. Someone else finds it; *they* don't get a chance to spend it."

"Pooh!" said Harold, "*they* don't care; they had the fun of getting it, didn't they? That's what a pirate wants; to scuttle ships and capture towns for ransom, and have an island somewhere to hide on and have high jinks with his crew! Feasts, where they roast whole oxen in the sand, and stave in wine casks; caves, piled up with booty and furnished like palaces; rugs on the floor, and the walls hung with tapestry and all that; silver to eat off that came out of some cathedral in the Spanish settlements; canned peaches and raisins, and pickles going all the time; nothing to do all day but lay round on the sand and smoke pipes. What do they want with gold? *They* don't have to go and buy things; they've got everything on their island; if they ain't, they go and ransack a town and get it!"

"Should you like to be a pirate, Sumner?" asked Starbright, turning to me, when Harold had drawn this glowing picture of freebooter existence.

I shook my head doubtfully. "I'm afraid Bermondsey—my father—wouldn't let me. I'm to go to West Point."

"West Point?" struck in Harold, "why, where's the difference? Soldiers capture towns and carry off loot, don't they? War's piracy, only the government's back of you and

takes the plunder. What was Drake but a pirate? And Hawkins, and Frobisher, and Sir Walter Raleigh? Pooh! I wouldn't wait for war, I'd rather go in on my own hook. Only," he added, "I wouldn't attack American ships; that would be mean."

"Have you read about Sir Francis Drake and the *Pelican*?" I asked, quickly, remembering what Mr. Walpole had said about his not liking books.

"Sure," he answered, readily; "wasn't he a fighter, though! He went round the world in the old *Pelican*. Why, like enough, he put into this very cove!"

"You do like to read books, then?" I cried, delighted at the prospect of discussing my heroes with him, with this sea before us and this fortress of rock for any port on the Spanish Main we chose to make it.

"Sure," he said again; "why, did Uncle Rand tell you I didn't?"

I nodded.

"Well, I don't like his kind, neither would you. Who likes old arithmetic, and grammar, and rot! And fractions!" he added with an injured air. "What good are fractions? Paul Jones didn't need 'em when he whipped the *Serapis*. Look at old Pusey, *he* knows fractions, I hope! Well, what did *he* ever do?"

"Who's old Pusey?" I asked.

"Him!" said Harold, with strong feeling, "Huh! you'll know him soon enough! He's a savage, that's what *he* is, and for what he does, he keeps a school in Lynn. A precious school *it* is!"

"Mr. Walpole isn't your uncle, is he?" I asked, trying to get these things in my head.

"No, he's my guardian, but I call him uncle."

"Why do you call him uncle?" I pursued, pushing my inquiry.

"'Cause I haven't got any uncle," he said, "and every fellow ought to have an uncle. Aunt Caroline ain't my aunt

either," he added, "but every fellow ought to have an aunt." His tone was aggrieved.

"Then Starbright isn't any relation to you?" I said, pondering on this discovery.

Harold shook his head. "Am I any relation to you?" I asked, finding myself reduced to this final inquiry.

"Blessed if I know!" replied Harold. "Your mother is, but blessed if I know what."

"Do you go to Harold's school?" I asked, turning to Starbright, finding the question of relationship blocked in this manner.

She shook her head decidedly. "That's a boys' school," she said. "I don't go to school at all. I have lessons home. You have yours home too, don't you?"

I nodded. "My father gives me mine. He knows a lot."

"Are you over to Oceanica yet?" she asked.

"Over where?" I asked, mystified.

"To Oceanica—in the geography, you know."

"N-no," I said doubtfully, "I don't believe so. I'm bounding Wisconsin."

"S-s-h! Dry up, you two!" said Harold, in a low whisper, "don't you see we're being boarded! Get down there behind the rock!" Seizing each of us with a hand he flattened us down against the ledge, and began to work himself along on his stomach toward the shelter indicated. Without stopping to inquire the reason for this remarkable proceeding, we followed his example, and soon the three of us crouched breathless behind the rampart, and I whispered, "What's the matter; who is it?"

"Silence between decks!" hissed Harold, peering round the side of the rock, and then modulating his voice to suit alternately the character of captain and under-officer, he exchanged with himself these hails.

"Sail ho!"

"Where away?"

"On the weather quarter!"

"Can you make her out?"

"Not yet, she's hull down and shows no colors."

At this point the strange ship sent a hail which we all recognized. It came clearly and distinctly from the road above: "Stel-la-a!"

"It's Maggie!" whispered Starbright. "We'll have to go in."

"S-s-sh!" whispered Harold. "She don't see us yet. Let her holler. Let's slip round the other side and climb the cliff, and cut away home before she gets here. She'll be fooled enough."

This bright suggestion met with instant favor. While Maggie continued to call our names from above, sweetening that shrill and thankless task by frequent interjectional commentary on what we would "ketch" when we did get home, alternated with artful ejaculations calculated to lead us to expose ourselves, as, "Oh! there you are, I see you, you needn't hide! Come along out of that!" we slipped stealthily along the ledge in the shadow of the cliff above, squirming on our stomachs by the more exposed places, rather to the detriment of our clothes, and conducting the retreat in all ways after the fashion of the most approved models. Harold, who was in the lead, lent a strong flavor of realism to the maneuver by keeping up in a hoarse whisper, in his assumed character of commander of the assailed ship, appropriate instructions to his crew:

"Steady, men!"

"Depress that gun!"

"Stand by to repel boarders!"

And finally in a culminating burst that brought Starbright and me to a standstill in consternation:

"Darn it all! Never mind her rigging, hull her! hull her!"

Happily for my knees, which were fast becoming raw, we soon reached a point where we could ascend unobserved, and scrambling up the side of the crumbling cliff, awkwardly enough for my part, we made a wide detour, scaled

a stone wall, gained the rear of the house and slipped quietly into the library; and but for the appearance of our clothing, general state of breathlessness, general state of knowing something excruciatingly funny and general state of pretending not to, we might have established some pretense of not having been out of it that evening.

Mrs. Walpole's plaintive "Well, I never"—was broken off by the entrance of Maggie, who, opening her mouth, or having it open, to proclaim our truancy, saw us and shut it again in a manner that plainly implied that no unnecessary words would be wasted on us after this, sufficient indication that bed would incontinently be our portion. We received this sentence with no great dejection. Indeed, we much preferred what was presently our situation of sitting by Harold's window in our night-clothes, overlooking the moonlit sea, to remaining below in company with Mrs. Walpole's nerves. Harold's room was in a low gable, heavily beamed overhead and resembling the cabin of a ship. After Maggie took away the light, Harold produced a Chinese lantern and suspended it from the roof, and its subdued glow greatly heightened this impression. Presently, in response to a cautious tapping on the wall, Starbright tiptoed in and took her place on the top of the trunk. Our host then produced, from a mysterious recess back of the chimney, a supply of cakes and a large chunk of citron, of which we partook liberally; and if the cakes were a little crumbly and the citron had acquired in its hiding place a slight flavor of soot, no one remarked upon these things or stinted his justice to the collation. That this situation should conduce to the telling of ghost stories, which should lead to the refusal of Starbright to go to bed again unless Maggie were summoned to conduct her thither and sit by her, were natural phenomena too obvious to require comment. As Harold strongly objected to the introduction of Maggie, a compromise was effected whereby Starbright went downstairs for a drink of water, by us jointly convoyed as far as the

second landing, when she skillfully enlisted the adhesion of Maggie for the return trip on a pretense of exploring the lumber room for "noises." I was not myself sorry to have a bedfellow, though this security I found did not extend to providing immunity against dreams; for Mrs. Walpole visited me that night mounted upon a giraffe, whom she instigated to obtrude his head in at the window and eat up the bedclothes. But I found when I awoke in the morning, blue with cold, that Harold had appropriated those articles and lay tightly rolled in them, snoring peacefully.

## CHAPTER VI

I FIND THAT I HAVE BEEN MADE THE VICTIM OF A CONSPIRACY

**I** SUPPOSE it can not be denied that Sundays are everywhere painfully distinguished from other days, in the minds of the youth of this land, by excessive length, extreme mental and bodily constraint, and irregularity of meals. When to these general characteristics be added, as was the case with my first Sunday at Swampscott, rising symptoms of homesickness and a generally acute state of nerves on the part of Mrs. Walpole, sufficient knowledge will be had of my emotions when Harold and I were summoned in the morning and the spectacle of our Sunday clothes, laid out on chairs, conveyed to us the first significant greeting of the day.

The confusion that inevitably attends upon a household putting off its week-day vestments for Sunday penitentials, became manifest as soon as the house was stirring. Harold couldn't find his collar, and pervaded the house in search of that necessary article with ever-increasing expostulatory inquiry. Starbright, clamoring to have her hair combed and her frock buttoned, followed Maggie about from room to room, pointedly disclaiming personal responsibility if she were made late to church.

Even our elders exhibit something of the purposelessness inseparable from this sort of bustle. Mr. Walpole, fully dressed for church, waits with some impatience in the hall. Mrs. Walpole calls from above stairs that she will be down directly. Mr. Walpole will utilize the time to go and select another pair of gloves, in place of those he has on. At which precise moment Mrs. Walpole descends, finds she has

to wait for Mr. Walpole, and goes back upstairs for her smelling-bottle.

And now the church bells, which had started in hopefully half an hour before, are beginning to fag. The last few reluctant clangs are already pealing out, mournfully deprecating the obstinacy of those who *will* go to hell, when it appears that Starbright's shoe hurts her and will have to be changed. Mrs. Walpole sits in the carriage a statue of resignation, while Maggie runs in for the shoes; wonders that she is still alive with all she has to go through. Starbright snuffles; says it isn't her fault, she *told* Maggie the buttons would have to be set over; wipes her eyes on her hat ribbons. Harold proposes that he and I get out and walk; is told to shut up, nobody spoke to *him*.

The horses stand and champ their bits or put their heads together and appear to whisper. It is my opinion that they are suggesting to each other the desirability of running away. This idea worries me considerably and I finally lean forward and mention it diffidently to the coachman, who takes no stock in it.

Starbright gets her old shoes on, Maggie buttoning them up with a vigor that brings the hat ribbons into requisition again, and her mother says, it's a nice combination, isn't it, to go to church in! One would think she had been brought up on the plains, but that was always the way; the more care one takes to make a child decent and respectable, the more they look and act like wild Indians. The fat coachman drives us and gets himself into trouble presently by turning so sharply into the road as to graze the curbing with the rear wheel, and jolt us somewhat. Mrs. Walpole instantly asks him what he supposes her nerves to be made of? Man apparently doesn't know. Mrs. Walpole says, "That's the way it is, no respect is shown her even by her servants, and does Mr. Walpole consider it the right thing and the manly thing to abet them in it?" Mr. Walpole observes that it is a fine morning, but gets no encouragement



except from Harold, who has noticed that it's always fine Sundays when a fellow don't get no chance to play. In church, Harold and I are placed at extreme ends of the pew with Starbright between her parents, an arrangement not at all to my liking. The pew is so high I can't see over the top without stretching, and as this annoys Mrs. Walpole, who can't keep her place in the prayer book on account of watching me, to detect and check my efforts to find out where the minister's voice comes from, I give up the attempt and remain at the bottom of my well. Under these circumstances I consider it unreasonable that the man should pass the plate to me, and shake my head to signify that I have nothing for him. Mrs. Walpole frowns and puts an envelope on the plate, and the man goes on, although I had expected he would stop to argue it with me. After service there is handshaking in the aisles, as the congregation slowly filters out through the doors.

As we got into the carriage, a young man, tall and dark, with a smooth, pleasant face, stepped quickly across the sidewalk and, raising his hat, spoke to Mr. Walpole.

"Ah, Princep!" exclaimed Mr. Walpole, extending his hand, "how are you? Didn't see you inside; or did you honor the good Doctor this morning, eh?"

"I'm afraid I can't claim anything for my opportune appearance here just as church was letting out," said the young man, laughing. "Fact is, I've been strolling on the beach and am just getting back toward lunch. Clara—Mrs. Parvin—volunteered to represent the Doctor and me at service this morning, and I left him pruning his potted geraniums. Our attorney has escaped me, I believe," he added, looking round at the thinning churchgoers. "I thought I might benefit vicariously from the Doctor's sermon by walking home with her, but I don't see her."

"Ahem!" said Mr. Walpole, glancing at his wife; "my dear, Mr. Princep."

Mrs. Walpole, who had adroitly avoided seeing the young

man, by trying to hold in conversation over the opposite wheel a lady who had three times already said good-bye, and backed away a yard or two each time, turned in affected surprise, and said, "Oh, good-morning," and immediately turned again to her confederate, but that lady had made good her escape, and Mrs. Walpole, thus basely deserted, could no longer avoid bestowing her attention on Mr. Princep's side.

"You set them all a good example, Mrs. Walpole," said Mr. Princep, lightly resting his hand on the carriage door and looking up at her with a graceful languor that very well became him; "you not only come to church yourself but you bring your husband and, as I live!" he added in his easy manner, looking over at me, "you've picked up a sheep by the wayside! The Doctor should appreciate you!"

"My husband does not accompany me to church for the sake of example," returned Mrs. Walpole, frigidly, "if he did, it would be quite lost. You are still staying at the Puseys', Mr. Princep?"

"Oh, yes," he said, taking no notice of the challenge in Mrs. Walpole's voice, "I'm still dawdling. But really, I shall surprise you all soon; those State Street chaps are going to let down the bars to me, at last. I shall be up and doing presently."

"Indeed!" cried Mr. Walpole, cordially. "You're going into business, then; glad to hear it, Princep. What's the line?"

"Lead, I believe," said Mr. Princep, negligently, "or zinc. Yes, I finally got them to take my money: it was really a great concession. I'm to be Western representative, I believe, out somewhere—where lead comes from, you know. I dare say I shall learn all about it in time."

"Brokerage, eh?" said Mr. Walpole, musing. "Well, there are great opportunities there, Princep; great opportunities."

"Oh, yes," assented Mr. Princep, but without enthusiasm,

"I've got all the figures somewhere; Frazer & Dahlm, you know; none more successful, I believe."

"In-deed!" exclaimed Mr. Walpole. "Really I congratulate you, Princep, you are certainly to *be* congratulated. You couldn't have made a more valuable connection; one of the oldest houses on the Street, and conservative. Very conservative. I predict your success. After all, there is nothing like business, nothing like business, my dear sir, for a man who can start with prospects like yours."

"Well, I'll give it a go," returned the young man, lightly. "I had a hard time of it to get my money in, and now I'm bound to do something to get it out, eh? It'll keep me busy. But who is the youngster in the jacket; did you really kidnap him?"

"Not quite," returned Mr. Walpole, laughing. "He's a sort of cousin of Harold's, come down to look us over. It would be useless to ask you to come and dine?"

"Quite, thanks. I'm keeping them waiting now at the Doctor's. I must be off. Mrs. Walpole, I make you the messenger of good news to the very next person you meet who says Harry Princep will never make anything of himself." Lifting his hat gayly he nodded good-humoredly to us all and strolled off. I caught his eye once more as he stopped to chat with a group at the corner, and he waved his hand to me. From what I had seen of Mr. Harry Princep I liked him very much.

Mr. Walpole proposed that we drive for half an hour before dinner, but Mrs. Walpole said that as her nerves were not made of iron and she had quite enough to do at home to see that Maggie didn't spoil everything she touched, she would beg to be set down there as quickly as possible. Afterwards, if *we* wished to go and enjoy ourselves we could; she would guarantee we'd come home when we got hungry. This retort settled the question effectively and we drove home at once. Drove home to stiff-backed chairs in the parlor and the solemn, muffled ticking of an immense

hall clock; to a cold meat dinner off the best plate, in a religiously darkened dining-room, somber in heavy wainscot, heavy furniture, and heavy pictures; to an interminable afternoon punctuated by a stately walk through the grounds, followed by a nap by Mrs. Walpole on the parlor couch with a handkerchief thrown over her face; to an equally interminable evening, during the course of which Starbright was commanded to play hymns on the organ and achieved thereon the most doleful and wretched sounds it has ever been my fortune to hear; to bread and milk at eight and welcome bed.

The days which followed, and which quickly dissipated the homesickness engendered by this terrible Sunday, were days of unmixed pleasure to me. The resumption of everyday clothes, the total avoidance of the parlor, and the taking of our meals in the sunny and brightly-gleaming kitchen with Maggie, undisturbed by Mrs. Walpole, who lived on tea and a smelling-bottle upstairs, quickly accomplished my domestication in the household. All day long we played on the rock-bound shore and watched the ships far out at sea, each one a treasure-ship, sailing to mysterious isles in southern, sunny seas. And when a storm came up, inking the sky, and the wind drove in from the sea, churning the waves into foam among our playhouse caverns in the rocks, our terror was lessened by our faith in those good spirits who rode beneath the keels of ships and snatched poor sailors from watery graves to bright, enchanted islands. Mr. Walpole came home every afternoon at five, and the fat coachman (whose name, whether surname or Christian I cannot say, was Butch), drove him over from Lynn, and it was our custom on pleasant days to go down the road and meet him, when Starbright would be taken into the trap with him, and Harold and I, with elbows pressed to sides and breathing in a scientific manner, would trot beside the bays all the way home, taking the lead at the finish with a sharp spurt which impressed us as a record-making pro-

ceeding, and marking the time by Harold's silver watch on the barn door with the date, condition of the road, and professional comment of Butch.

Harold's adventurous love of the sea sent us on many piratical cruises along the shore, from which we seldom returned without cause, either of wet or torn clothing or bruised bodies, for stalking the house from the rear and gaining undetected access to our room, to repair our appearance. For Harold and me this was usually easily accomplished, but Starbright was often sorely pressed to evade the double watchfulness of Maggie and her mother, whom no artificially sand-dried shoes or mended frock could deceive.

It was on the occasion of one of our excursions along the shore that we met Mr. Princep again. He was accompanied by a very pretty, quietly dressed lady, who carried a blue parasol over her shoulder. We were making our way along a very narrow footpath at the side of the breakwater. The cliff rose sheer at our backs, and two persons could pass on the footway only by the most careful maneuvering. Mr. Princep was in the lead and came to a stop when he saw us.

"Ahoy there!" he cried, "what craft is that?"

"The *Avenging Hand*," replied Harold from the rear. "Haul down that blue flag!"

"These are the bold pirates of the North Shore," said Mr. Princep, laughing and turning to his companion. "Shall we surrender to them?"

"Just pass that foremost pirate on to me," replied the lady, "and I will discuss terms with him."

Mr. Princep took me by the arms and swung me off my feet. I had a swift vision of the black rocks below and the dancing sea beyond, and in a moment I was plumped down again on the ledge beside her.

"There!" cried my captor. "Do you hear what the lady says? She will surrender to you, luckiest pirate that ever sailed! See that you set her ransom high!" He spoke more

to the lady than to me I thought, and she *seemed* to think so too. She put her parasol in front of him and shut him off from us.

"Don't interfere," she said, peeping round at him, "we will settle the matter out of court." And she stooped and kissed me. "What is your name?" she whispered, with her face close to mine.

"Sumner Bibbus, ma'am," I whispered back.

This assumption of secrecy seemed to be part of the punishment she was inflicting on her companion. She directed an arch look at him over the top of her parasol.

"We don't intend for everyone to know what goes on, do we?" she said.

"No, ma'am," I replied.

She was older than her companion, I thought, or a certain composed, mature expression in her face carried that impression. Her hair was dark and glossy and was gathered straight back from her low forehead under a wide-brimmed hat, and formed a knot at the back of her neck. Her face was oval with large, dark eyes and a beautifully formed mouth, which displayed dimples at the corners when she smiled. A slender white neck, encompassed by a blue ribbon tied in a large bow at the front, completed the picture of what I thought was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen.

"Oh, very well!" cried Mr. Princep, endeavoring to put away the obstructing parasol. "If we are going to make individual terms for ourselves I will negotiate with this Avenger." He caught up Starbright and passed her along in the same manner he had me and rewarded himself with a kiss, which cost him a struggle and some vigorous slaps, which seemed not to bother him in the least.

Harold surveyed these proceedings with deep disgust. To be kissed he considered almost as great a humiliation as to be spanked. He turned and beat a hasty retreat to a point where he could scale the cliff, when he ran along the top

over our heads, uttering derisive cries, indicative of personal triumph over the deep-laid schemes of wily and resourceful foes. When he rejoined us he expressed great indignation at my pusillanimity in submitting to the indignity of being kissed by a woman.

"Why didn't you duck?" he demanded. "I'd have shown her!"

"How did I know she was going to do it?" I protested, weakly.

"Why, when a woman makes up to you like that you ought to know it's for no good purpose! You ought to have been on your guard, anyway! Why, she's a married woman!" said Harold, falling back on moral grounds.

"Well, why didn't you say so?" I demanded, seeing an opening here. "I didn't know, did I? *I'm* a stranger here, ain't I? You ought to look out for these things yourself. What'd ye go to leading me into danger for? Who was she, anyway?"

"It was Mrs. Parvin," said Starbright. "I think she's nice."

"Of course *you'd* think so," retorted Harold. "You're a girl!" Without elucidating the logic of this conclusion, Harold appeared to consider that he had effectively estopped Starbright's defense of Mrs. Parvin and left them both in rather a bad light. Indeed, so forcible was the expression of his masculine superiority, conveyed in the tone of his voice, the toss of his head, and the strut of his legs, that I found myself affected by it, and began to doubt if Starbright had not really compromised us in some way. It appeared due that I should walk a little ahead from her and not appear to Harold to support her in her questionable attitude.

"You're just jealous!" said Starbright, with the retort feminine, and this charge being clearly beneath his notice Harold chose not to reply to it.

I suppose I had been about three weeks at Swampscott

and nothing had transpired to enlighten me upon the subject of my return. I had early written to my parents, giving a full account of my visit, and both had replied promptly, but nothing had been said about my coming home. My father exhorted me to employ fully my powers of observation, which he considered to be excellent training for the mind, and often productive, when least expected, of the most important results. The Duke of Wellington, he said, by exercising this mental habit, had carefully scrutinized the field of Waterloo some time previous to the battle there, which gave him an immense advantage over Napoleon, who had never examined the ground, though he must have seen it frequently. Heaven forbid, he said, that a foreign invader should ever again set a hostile foot upon our shores, but in view of my future profession a knowledge of the topography of the coast about there might come in handy.

My mother begged me to give some attention to poetry in my leisure moments. Nothing, she wrote, was better calculated to refine the intellect, awaken appreciation of the beautiful, and conduce to the attainment of high ideals in life, than regular and systematic communion with the accepted masters of poetic expression.

The first intimation I had that my stay under Mr. Walpole's roof was likely to be longer than I had anticipated when I arrived, came to me on the occasion of a dinner party which Mrs. Walpole gave one evening; an event foreshadowed by numerous breakfast-table consultations between her and Mr. Walpole which had greatly impressed me, I know, by their portentous gravity, and which both Harold and Starbright privately assured me would mean a quantity of good things to eat, out of which we might hope to replenish our larder upstairs, which the watchfulness of Maggie had latterly reduced to a low ebb. The guests were not to be numerous, I understood, but very select. When I saw them, however, on the arrival of the



evening, I formed the conclusion that this selection had been made less with respect to their looks than to some more sterling virtues known to Mrs. Walpole, that did not appear on the surface. A Mr. and Mrs. Biddulph, with the freedom of neighbors, arrived early; so early that they found Mrs. Walpole not yet dressed, and the subsequent efforts of that lady to escape upstairs before the other guests should arrive, and Mrs. Biddulph's artless endeavors to detain her, formed the first grown-up social drama that I had witnessed. Mr. Biddulph was a large, portly man with a wide, blunt face and bushy side-whiskers. He was bald, and had that peculiarity of fat neck which, from the rear, and in conjunction with a thin rim of damp, clinging hair extending between his ears, unfortunately gave him the appearance of a prize porker dressed for market. As soon as he was shown into the drawing-room he seized Mr. Walpole's hand, and refusing to relinquish it drew him into a corner, and at once began a long account of some highly involved transaction he had been engaged in that day, whereof the point appeared to be that he had seen his way through it from the start, whereas the other party had been hopelessly in the dark. Mrs. Biddulph was a lady who had reached that stage of stoutness where she found it necessary to occupy a studied attitude on the extreme edge of her chair, in order to prevent her stomach forming a shelf immediately under her nose. Even in this position the problem of what to do with her hands, in the total absence of a lap to fold them in, was not easily solved. Mrs. Biddulph's treatment of that problem was, however, fairly successful. She used a fan with a long tassel which enabled her, with practiced, negligent handling, to bridge the space across her ample form, while the slight toward inclination of her body necessary to the accomplishment of this design, gave her a fortuitous appearance of listening politely to conversation addressed to her. At table, where it was necessary to abandon these tactics, she was compelled to sit somewhat back

from the board and with her side turned toward it, a position which gave her an air of not wanting anything to eat.

Several newcomers had arrived in the interim, who, after the fashion of late comers, were now darting about with an excess of fervor, shaking hands with everybody. One was a sandy-haired young man in a good deal of collar, who introduced the term "legal fiction" into conversation at least half a dozen times in half an hour, and was evidently a fledgeling of the law. Another was a young (that is, unmarried) lady, who had "run down" from Lynn, which was understood to account for her having no male escort, the having "run down" indicating the casual and unpremeditated nature of her arrival.

"Sumner, shake hands with Doctor Pusey," said Mr. Walpole's voice at my elbow. I looked up quickly. A little, round-headed, pink-faced man stood before me with one hand at his chin and the other behind him. I got to my feet as soon as I could, and immediately felt shocked and ashamed to discover that I was nearly if not quite as tall as he was. It didn't seem respectable. "This is to be your new pupil, Doctor,—Sumner Bibbus."

Although I was so confused at Mr. Walpole's words, and at his laying his hand kindly on my shoulder, that I scarcely knew what I was doing, I managed to put out my hand to the queer little figure before me, which the figure, after turning the matter over in its mind apparently, finally concluded to take. He shook it and immediately put his own hands back under his coat-tails.

"I believe, Doctor," continued Mr. Walpole, still with his hand on my shoulder, "that you will find him an apt scholar and fairly well advanced for his age, in some branches, anyway."

"Hum," said the Doctor.

"If you find that his progress will allow you to place him with Harold and advance their studies together, I should be the better pleased. I want them to be a help to each other."

"Hah," said the Doctor.

"As I told you, the circumstances of his bringing up have perhaps placed him at a disadvantage with those of your boys who have acquired their rudiments in a more regular way with you, but I do not fear for him. He's been quite a reader, I believe, and you will know how to use that foundation, even if you did not lay it, eh?"

"Um-um," said the Doctor.

"He is a little unprepared to-night," continued Mr. Walpole, smiling down upon me. "I haven't talked it over with him yet, but you'll find him ready!" He clapped me encouragingly on the back. "Harold, come and speak to Doctor Pusey."

Harold came forward and received a reluctant handshake from the Doctor, who, however, wasted no more words on him than he had on me. He was certainly the most remarkable-looking man I had ever seen. There was not a vestige of hair upon his head or face. His complexion was like a woman's and his skin was as soft and velvety looking. Yet the glitter of a pair of steel-blue eyes, and a nose like an eagle's beak, more than redeemed his face from anything like femininity. As he moved away with his hands behind him and his head inclined slightly forward and downward, as if he were on the lookout for something to peck at, he was not unlike a great bird; an illusion heightened by the long, spreading tails of his black dress coat, which nearly touched the floor.

A general movement of the guests toward the dining-room interrupted my speculations upon the meaning of these things and sent Harold, Starbright, and me into the library, where we had been instructed to remain until Maggie should serve us with what of the viands were considered innocuous for minors to go to bed on. The library opened upon the dining-room and was separated therefrom only by hangings, which afforded convenient observation for us of the festivities within. Whether this proximity to pleasures from which

we were excluded was considered an advantage by us, I doubt.

The sandy-haired young man, abandoning his legal fiction at the conclusion of the first course, struck out boldly on a new topic and addressed himself to the young lady from Lynn. "Pardon me," he said, with an engaging smile, "did I hear Mrs. Walpole call you Zoë?"

The young lady from Lynn, doubting if there was not something arch in the nature of this inquiry, affected some confusion and directed a coy glance at the sandy-haired young man.

"Must I tell you?" she asked, simpering.

The sandy-haired young man (whom I had heard called Mr. Pulk) would appeal to the Court for a ruling. Mr. Walpole, unanimously elected to the Bench, smiled down the table at the young lady from Lynn, and was of the opinion that witness was bound to answer the question of counsel. Everybody applauded. Impression general that Mr. Pulk would get off something good directly. Very well, if she was deserted by all her friends the young lady from Lynn (whose name was Killup) would have to admit that her first name *was* Zoë.

"It's Greek, ain't it?" asked Mr. Pulk.

Really, she didn't know; thought it probable, however.

Here a guest whom no one had noticed before, speaking for the first and last time that evening, said (with his mouth full) that he thought it was German. Reason for so thinking not stated.

Mr. Pulk, though sorry to disagree with his learned friend, was sure it was Greek. Thinks he has seen the name in the classics somewhere, *just* where he doesn't remember.

"Are there two dots over the 'e'?" inquired Mr. Biddulph, anxiously. Miss Killup thinks not.

Mr. Biddulph greatly disappointed. Painful curiosity everywhere as to what these dots would have signified if they had been admitted in evidence. Miss Killup, finding herself

thus suddenly a public character, assumes an air of strict impartiality and smiles equal encouragement upon Mr. Pulk and the guest who had advanced the German theory. The former gentleman, satisfied apparently in establishing his contention, evinced an inclination to return to his dinner. This, Miss Killup can by no means allow.

"Perhaps you have some association with the name," she says, with an insinuating smile and another arch look. But Mr. Pulk shakes his head and helps himself to cheese. More plain that Mr. Pulk is through with the subject. Indignation appears in the face of Miss Killup—is reflected in the face of Mr. Biddulph. Impression general that Mr. Pulk is an impostor. Is known to fame no more that evening.

"Princep gives us good news of himself," said Mr. Walpole, interposing to relieve the situation and addressing the Doctor. "Splendid connection he's got, eh?"

The Doctor bowed gravely. "Young men must be up and doing these days," he said. "I hope he will improve the opportunity."

"Sorry he couldn't be with us to-night," pursued Mr. Walpole, "but his engagements wouldn't admit of it. He starts west in a few days he tells me."

"Mr. Princep will find his surroundings in Missouri somewhat different from those he has been accustomed to here, I imagine," said Mrs. Biddulph, shaking her head with an air of decision.

"The very words I used to Mr. Walpole no longer ago than yesterday!" struck in Mrs. Walpole. "Randolph, you will recall our conversation, I am sure. And it is *my* opinion," she added firmly, "that he won't stay there a year! You can talk to me from now till doomsday," said Mrs. Walpole, throwing herself back in her chair, in readiness to undergo this conversational ordeal, "but that is my opinion and you won't change it!"

"Oh, I don't believe Missouri is so bad as that," said Mr. Walpole, laughing. "It is scarcely a frontier any longer,

you know. Why, Doctor Pusey will tell you they have almost every attraction there that Boston can afford! And a much more agreeable climate."

"I should imagine all parts of the world might be equally attractive to a young man like Princep," said the Doctor, indifferently. "Why should this particular locality hold him? Young men are not to be held in leading strings in this age."

"But, my dear Doctor," persisted Mrs. Biddulph, settling her gleaming shoulders across the table at the speaker as if she would pin him against the wall, "consider the sort of life he will have to live out there! Think of the absolute lack of society such as a man of his nature craves! Don't tell me that Harry Princep, born and brought up in Boston, in *Boston*," repeated Mrs. Biddulph, with feeling, "can exist in surroundings like those and not break down! Don't tell me!"

"The Doctor would naturally take a masculine view of it," said Mrs. Walpole, smiling. "You can see how completely he ignores *us*. It doesn't occur to him that there might be some attraction here for Mr. Princep that even the natural attractions of Missouri can not supply."

"Oh, come!" cried Mr. Walpole, laughing; "are you going to have us believe that Princep leaves his heart behind him?"

"And are you going to be so unchivalrous as to deny the possibility of such a thing?" retorted Mrs. Walpole, with animation. "Mrs. Parvin, pray rebuke my husband and tell him Mr. Princep has not the poor opinion of us he would have us believe."

Mrs. Parvin raised her eyes and gazed at the speaker steadily. "I am not aware that Mr. Princep needs any defense of that sort," she said, quietly, "nor that it belongs to me to make it for him." There was a disdain in her tone that she made no effort to repress, and there was a momentary stillness about the table when she had spoken, when even the rattle of a dish would have been a matter of absorbing interest to the company.

"Not to you but to our sex, surely!" cried Mrs. Walpole. "We are being traduced."

Mrs. Parvin's indifference was so real that it was quite useless. Mrs. Walpole had to give up and look for new weapons.

Perhaps it was for that purpose that she presently begged her guests to excuse her for a moment and left the table. Perhaps it was for that purpose she entered the library a moment later from the drawing-room, and stood before the mirror, and with her clenched hand struck herself in the face! Perhaps it was for that purpose she stamped on the floor with her foot, while her convulsed body swayed backward and forward in the wild tempest of passion that engulfed her! Mute with fright we watched this strange scene. Never have I seen anything like the fury that possessed this woman in the few brief moments that elapsed before she became aware of our presence. Concentrated, pent-up, dumb! Not a sound escaped her; even her fierce, low breathing we could rather see than hear, as her bosom rose and fell. Her face was white and rigid. Her hands were clenched, now at her throat, now at her bare bosom, now at her temples; and wherever they stayed they left a mark. I think we would have cried out had she not that moment seen us, and come toward us with swift, noiseless strides.

"What are you doing here!" she said, in a low, fierce whisper. I thought she would have struck Starbright. The child stood before her with trembling lip, but spoke no word. Her mother, with her face writhing, made a passionate gesture for us to go away from the portières and we slipped quietly back into the room. She steadied herself a moment where she stood, with her hand in the folds of the hangings and pressed her handkerchief once or twice to her face. The next moment she had pushed the hangings aside and re-entered the dining-room.

In that brief moment she must have mastered herself,

must have banished every trace of the passion that had racked her. We heard her utter some light apology for her absence, heard the clatter of the table resumed, heard her airy laugh float above it all. But our interest in the proceedings had vanished. Harold manifested no further concern in the probable residue of the board. Starbright sat quietly crying. I wanted to go home. Under these circumstances Maggie's entrance with instructions for us to go to bed, was hailed as a welcome relief.

Harold maintained a thoughtful silence as we went upstairs and undressed for bed. He made no remark until we had lain some time in the dark, when he nudged me.

"Say," he said, "what a pirate Aunt Caroline would make!"



## CHAPTER VII

I AM INTRODUCED TO MY FATE, AND NOT LIKING IT THINK  
I WILL WALK OUTDOORS

I WAS not surprised when Mr. Walpole asked me at breakfast if I would like to drive to the station with him. I readily conjectured that the proposal had something to do with his mysterious words to Doctor Pusey of the night before, and my heart beat high at the prospect of arriving at an understanding of these things. Harold's request to go with us was vetoed, and his resentment thereat prompted him to accompany the carriage a considerable distance down the road, and direct public attention to me by calling out remarks of an injurious and opprobrious character, calculated to cast derision on my pretensions. This made me very uncomfortable, and it was a relief when our increased speed finally left him behind.

Mr. Walpole asked me, as soon as we were relieved of these attentions, what I thought of Doctor Pusey. I said I thought he was very nice. I don't suppose I knew what I meant by that any more than other people do when they make the remark, but it was the only thing I could think of to say that seemed sufficiently polite.

Mr. Walpole shook his head as though he considered this opinion inadequate. "He's a very learned man, Sumner, a very learned man. And learning is the greatest thing in the world, remember that. Doctor Pusey keeps a school for boys; a very fine school indeed, eh? Perhaps you know that?"

"Yes, sir," I replied, "Harold told me so; he goes there, doesn't he?"

Mr. Walpole nodded. "Harold goes there. Should *you* like to go?" He smiled down upon my trepidation at this abrupt question and playfully pulled my ear. "Because you *are* going; it's all settled! Eh? What do you say to that? Shall we let Doctor Pusey make a learned, useful man of you, so that you will grow up to be a credit to us all, eh?"

I saw in a moment what *this* meant. My breath came quickly and I could not keep my lip from trembling. That my parents had known of this when I left home, and that I had parted from them in ignorance of it all, now came upon me with a shock.

"I have talked it over with your parents," continued Mr. Walpole, "and they recognize how important it is that you should have regular schooling. Your father, Sumner, is not rich. Eh? You know that. Education costs money. Your parents are willing to make any sacrifice to get it for you, and that sacrifice now takes the form of separation from you for a time. That is their share, and that too must be part of yours: but it is upon you and upon your bravery we all depend to repay us. Eh? will you do your part?"

I blinked hard at the broad back of Butch to keep my tears back. The dear old bookshop with my father's kindly face beaming out from behind the counter; the familiar parlor with its familiar clutter and my mother quietly rocking before the fire; the cave underneath the sidewalk; the sunny balcony over the door; the Sunday walks about the Monument; all swam into my vision, and for a moment my fortitude gave way.

"I—I think I'd rather go home, if you please, sir," I faltered.

"Rather go home!" cried Mr. Walpole, as if the bare possibility of such a thing had never presented itself to his imagination. "Rather go home! Why, the boy's joking!" Affecting to laugh heartily at the humor of the thing, Mr. Walpole clapped me on the back hilariously, but soon checked himself on seeing my utter inability to pluck up,

and pulled perplexedly at his mustache. "Why," said he, "what would your father say? What would your mother say? What," said Mr. Walpole, finding this line of argument to promise well, "what would Starbright say? What would Harold say? Tut, tut!"

The thought of Harold's freckled face *was* a comfort, and it rose before me, with happy results, to combat the terrors of school, known instinctively to childhood. He would be there, anyway. I shook the tears out of my eyes and straightened up. Mr. Walpole's hand was upon my shoulder; there was comfort in the broad back of Butch; the sun was shining brightly, and the ring of the horses' hoofs on the hard road had a cheery sound.

"Are there—are there very many boys at Doctor Pusey's?" I asked, giving way a little.

"Bless me, no!" cried Mr. Walpole, seizing his advantage, "very few indeed. It's a private school, you know, and very exclusive. Why, I should say there were not more than a dozen boys there, at the most. But you're not afraid of *them*?"

"No, sir," said I, telling lie number one.

"They all live about here, mostly. You'll soon come to know them all. Lord! you'll take to it like a duck to water!"

"When does school begin, sir?" I asked.

"In *one* week," said Mr. Walpole, with sprightliness.

I collapsed again. "Shall I go home first?" I faltered.

"I don't believe I would," said Mr. Walpole, delicately. "I'd wait and go next holiday. You'll have something to tell about yourself then, something worth while. And it isn't so long, you know."

I didn't know, but I said nothing, and furtively winked away my tears, engendered afresh by the one-week discovery.

"Now, whom do you suppose," continued Mr. Walpole, looking down at me, "is doing this for you?"

"Sending me to school, sir?" I had a shamed consciousness that my manner certainly didn't indicate that I considered it a kindness, or that I was grateful for it.

"Ah! sending you to school. Providing an education for you. Making a learned, useful man of you."

"You, sir."

Mr. Walpole shook his head. "Not me. I am only the agent. You have to thank Harold for it. He is doing it."

I suppose my amazed inability to grasp the meaning of what seemed an utterly absurd statement showed itself in my face, for he went on: "Harold is rich, or will be when he is of age. I am his guardian. Eh? you know that. I am spending Harold's own money to educate him. To feed and clothe him. To provide for his pleasure. In short, I do whatever I deem wise for his good; that is the office of a guardian. Just now I deem it wise to provide a companion for him of his own age, and you are to be that companion. Eh? but Harold's money pays for it. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," I replied, telling lie number two.

"That's right. You and Harold are both gainers by it. Shake hands on it."

We shook hands, and Mr. Walpole seemed greatly pleased. "Never say die!" he exclaimed, as we put him down at the station, and I, having little heart to say anything, only smiled and shook my head.

"Butch," said I, as we drove back, "did you ever go to school?"

Butch leaned out over the wheel and spat reflectively in the road. "No," he growled, "not to your kind, I didn't."

"What kind of a school did you go to, Butch?" said I.

"I went," said Butch, slowly, "to the school of Hard Knocks, that's where I went. It was kep'," he continued, with a growing perception of the humor of his reply, "it was kep' by a gent named Kicks, and what he learned me was mostly Tough Cheese. That's the school I went to,"

said Butch, rather gratified at having achieved this original description of his education, "Hard Knocks, Kicks, and Tough Cheese."

"But you can read, you know, Butch," I persisted.

"I kin read a hoss," replied Butch, "as fur as I kin see him. And my eyes is purty good, too," he added, as an after-thought calculated to add strength to this statement.

"Then you don't know anything about what a school is like," I said, disappointed in my design of finding out the nature of the institution I was to become a part of.

"Waal," said Butch, again refreshing himself over the wheel, "they is chalk a-plenty, an'—an' sponges!" And, although I pursued my inquiries all the way home, I found that this was the extent of Butch's knowledge upon the subject, wherein he and I bore toward each other a rather close resemblance.

Harold and Starbright were not at all surprised when I told them.

"I knew it," said Harold, "but what was the use of spoiling your fun by telling you?" Which was something of a philosophical view, too.

I wrote to my parents immediately, acquainting them with Mr. Walpole's proposition, not without a furtive hope that they might repudiate complicity in the arrangement and send for me to come home; but a letter soon arrived signifying their entire approval of and participation in the plan, and urging me to apply myself with zeal to the new opportunities opening before me.

"We want you," my father wrote, "to enter Doctor Pusey's classic halls (if I may so ambitiously denominate an educational institution which does not, I believe, aspire to the university plane) with the high resolve to acquire and carry away all the knowledge which the instructors of those scholastic precincts are competent to invest you with. By the time you have accomplished this, it is my confident

expectation that I shall be in a position to transfer you to a higher seat of learning. It is scarcely necessary for me to observe that I allude to the technical institution which rears its historic front on the banks of the Hudson.

"For myself, I may mention to you that I expect, very shortly, to take up the study of law, in which it is the opinion (far too partial, I am aware) of my friends that I shall not fail to score an immediate and gratifying success. If this should be the case (and I will not take it upon myself to discuss the probabilities, *pro* and *con*), your mother and I will betake ourselves to 'fresh fields and pastures new.' (See *Lycidas*, undoubtedly Milton's finest elegiac performance.) In other words, we shall deem it fitting to depart from the bookshop and, I may add, from the society of an individual whom I will not more definitely indicate than to say that he has the appearance of a Ghoul and the assurance (with respect to the constant borrowing of stock in trade) of a Horse-jockey, and seek a station more commensurate with our abilities and (I hope) our deserts.

"I need not admonish you to apply yourself with diligence to your studies, mindful of the superstructure which is to be raised upon the foundation you will now lay, and always to remember that the illustrious name you bear imposes upon you a responsibility which should at once be your pride and jealous care; a responsibility owed, I may say, jointly, to yourself, to us, to your namesake, and to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

"If the scope of your reading should, at any time, transcend in any direction the limitations of the Doctor's library (which probably may not extend beyond the text-books requisite for the specific branches pursued by his classes), do not fail to remember that the *bibliotheca literaria* of the shop is always at your disposal."

This letter dashed my last hope, and thereafter I resigned myself to my fate, not, however, without forming a juvenile

and unfavorable judgment of the manner in which I had been delivered over to it.

The few remaining days of vacation passed quickly. Harold and I being day pupils, little preparation was made for our entrance upon the new term beyond Maggie's looking out, under Mrs. Walpole's directions, our most serviceable clothing and thickest boots, it being a recognized principle with her that only the strongest habiliments were suitable to withstand the expansive pressure supposed to be engendered in the bodies of youth by bookish applications.

Doctor Pusey's house stood in indifferently kept grounds overlooking the ocean, and was a three-story brick structure, destitute of shutters, and presenting, on the whole, a rather forbidding aspect. Rather like a prison, I thought, and rather like a prisoner I felt when the heavy door swung open and the maid bade us go up to the Doctor's study.

Oh, never-to-be-forgotten Doctor's study! How often has its grim door invaded my youthful dreams! Home never seemed so far, or earthly succor so hopeless, as when I stood before it! What terror the very words conveyed! "Do you want to be sent to the Doctor's study?" was a question that would have produced a hush in the school-room in the midst of a riot. But on this occasion Harold, strong in the consciousness of innocence that attends upon the first day of the term, pushed boldly in and I followed him. The Doctor sat at his desk, opening his mail.

He looked up and let his eyes rest upon us for a moment. "You may go to the classroom, Portal," he said, resuming his occupation, "and report to Mr. Geddes; Bibbus, remain here."

Harold backed out the door, leaving me standing in the room, scared and trembling, clutching at my hat, staring in a sort of fascination at the little Doctor. He seemed not to be looking at me, yet I felt that my hopeless look at Harold as he left me, and the almost unconscious movement I made to follow him, were not lost upon him.

"Bibbus," he said, speaking in his cold, even tones and looking at me across the desk with his steely, searching blue eyes, "I observe a servility in your attitude toward Portal that argues a serious defect of character, and I shall set myself to correct it." He closed his eyes for a second and compressed his lips until the straight line of his mouth seemed to lengthen by inches. "We will have no toadying here, sir. If a boy has not been taught at home to respect himself, *I* teach him! So, if you come here with the expectation of truckling to Portal, or relying upon him for protection, you will do well to dismiss that expectation. Dismiss it at once. Whatever superiority years, or strength, or self-reliance may have given him, will not advantage you; he is Portal and you are Bibbus. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," I whispered.

"A mean, low, base trait of character!" continued the Doctor, leveling his ruler at me and lifting his lip in a cruel sneer. "The trait of a slave! But I can take it out of a boy; I have a way of taking it out of him. But I warn him first. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," I whispered again. I was sick with fear. My knees loosened and a dizzy faintness seized me; but I stood still and never took my eyes from his face. Some terrible fascination kept them glued there; I could not have withdrawn them had my life depended upon it.

"Every boy stands upon his own character here. If he is a weakling or a coward that is the position he occupies; no mean dependence upon his fellows nor contemptible, groveling, boot-licking, parasitical arts will secure him any other."

The Doctor took his eyes off me for the first time and resumed the occupation of opening his mail with a thin ivory paper-cutter. "Another thing," he went on, working away busily and shooting sudden, piercing glances at me from time to time, as if he were punctuating his words by that means, "I don't encourage tale-bearing nor complaints. A boy has the alternative here of defending himself or



submitting to abuse, should he be so unfortunate as to invite the dislike of his fellows. His standing with them depends upon himself. An appeal to me would probably produce a result the opposite from the one desired. That is all. I have said that I warn a boy, but I only warn him once. Go to the classroom and tell Mr. Geddes that you have been here."

I got out of the room as best I could and closed the door. Miserable, heartsick, and forlorn, I could have wished myself dead. I had never had a harsh word spoken to me in my life, and the Doctor's sunk into my soul. And my pride was stung. Was it true that I had exhibited my dependence upon Harold so plainly as to call forth this cruel censure? Was I a coward, a weakling? The habit of introspection is not developed in a boy of ten; I had never attempted it before, but standing there in the strange passage outside the Doctor's study, my breast heaving, my eyes wet, my hands clenched, indignant, smarting, burning with a sense of injury, and yet crushed and humiliated in a manner beyond the power of description, I asked myself the question. I knew that I liked Harold; I felt that he was older, wiser, and my superior. I knew that in my dread of going to a strange school and of meeting strange boys I, brought up in the society of simple natures, and nourished in the Bohemian atmosphere of the bookshop, turned to him for support. Was this servility, cowardice? I could not ignore the answer which the wild panic of my heart that moment returned. I gazed down the passage toward a door at the other end, whence the faint hum of voices indicated the classroom I had been directed to seek, and felt that the power to approach that door alone and enter it, was not in me. This was my answer. I knew now that I was a coward; the Doctor was right, he had read my character at a glance. But even the shame that this relentless truth awoke in my breast could not overcome my fear. I fought with myself; in my childish passion I inwardly called myself

names, but not one step could I force myself to take in that fatal direction. Fearfully, I tiptoed across the carpet and looked over the banister into the lower passage. It was deserted, and I knew the front door opened from it. In a moment I made my decision, all my remaining resistance giving way to the sudden inrush of a new hope; hope of deliverance from my terror and the shame of my own pusillanimity. I would fly from this place, from this cruel, sneering, misshapen man, from the schoolroom I dared not enter, from Harold whom I dared not face. I would go home, not to Mr. Walpole's, but to the dear old bookshop, to the kind father, and the mother who was a sister too. I would walk there, I would crawl on my knees, I would beg my way, but I would reach there and I would never leave it again. I had no shame now. I knew I was a coward, but I did not care for that. I would go now even if Harold were there to stay me; I would go if the Doctor himself should open the door behind me and look at me with those cruel eyes.


I slipped along the banister to the head of the stairs and softly began the descent. The stairs were heavily carpeted and I made no noise as I glided quickly down, with my arm flung over the rail to support myself, for I was faint and weak with the passion which had shaken me. Yet, withal, I never had a stronger purpose than the purpose I then had to leave that house forever.

I reached the bottom and sped to the door. What if I could not open it! Feverishly, I laid hold of the massive handle, but before I could exert my strength upon it or, indeed, decide which way to turn it, the door suddenly opened, yielding to a pressure from without, and a man stepped quickly into the passage, bumping into me and very nearly oversetting me where I stood. He caught me by the collar and restored my equilibrium before I could utter the cry of terror that was in my throat. I don't know what swift instinct told him of the anguish, the terror, the

broken-heartedness that was mine, or of the purpose kept alive through it all that was mine too, but he knew it all in a moment. He put his hand on my head, and bending over me, turned my face up to his.

"You poor little kid!" he said. And I threw my arms around this strange man's neck and cried on his breast.

He said never a word more, but picked me up in his arms and carried me back upstairs. At the top he set me gently down, wiped my tears away with his handkerchief, and taking my hand in his, led me down the long passage, toward the door from which my terror had driven me but a moment before.



## CHAPTER VIII

### DOCTOR PUSEY'S ESTABLISHMENT

**A**NYONE who has ever amused himself with that irresponsible philosophy which speculates on what might have happened, in the event of certain contingencies which themselves never came to pass, will doubtless have recalled, upon a survey of his life, many occasions when his fancy is afforded free play in this respect. *I* have often wondered what would have become of me if I had succeeded in getting out of that door. Which of the million of life's eddies would have seized and whirled me away? Whither would they have borne me? Unseen, unfelt, how they surge about our feet! My bark was on the wave, but the ocean tossed it back. Can I say it had been better or worse had I launched it then, then and not later? Let me go on.

Convulsively gripping the hand of my conductor, I proceeded with him toward the schoolroom. And now for the first time I looked up at him to see what manner of man he was. The first thing that impressed me was his great height; he towered above me an immeasurable distance. Like most very tall men whom I have seen, he stooped a little, or his shoulders seemed to droop forward. He was a young man, not over thirty, but his hair was quite thin and he was dressed in an oldish manner. Perhaps I mean old-fashioned or that his clothes were black; at any rate he had an appearance, partly clerical, partly professional, that seemed to lend him age that did not, on close inspection, belong to him. A long silken mustache of a rich

brown drooped about the corners of his mouth, and then and afterwards when I came to know him better, one of the notable things about his face was the way this mustache was agitated by the humorous twitchings of his mouth, which, though partially concealed, seemed to telegraph to the observer by this means what was going on underneath. His eyes were large, moist, and blue; perhaps I can best call them laughing eyes; and the only wrinkles in his face were those of happy augury that radiated fan-like from their corners. He wore a flower in the lapel of his coat and he smelled strongly of cigar smoke. I know not what instinct told me this was Mr. Geddes.

As he pushed open the door of the schoolroom, the din of voices which had reached us in the passage suddenly ceased, but as soon as our appearance disclosed to its occupants the nature of the intrusion, it immediately broke out again, and there was a general clapping of hands and a rush towards us. My companion nodded and smiled on all sides in acknowledgment of this reception, as he made his way through the crowd of boys (among whom I saw Harold, who seemed considerably surprised at seeing me in this company), to a desk which stood upon a raised platform at the upper end of the room. He still retained my hand, and only relinquished it to install me on a front bench immediately under his desk.

"Now, young gentlemen!" he cried, "a new colleague; Portal, present him, but don't forget the warning bell. Doctor'll be here presently." Giving me an encouraging nod, he dove into his desk.

Harold's idea of presenting me to his fellows was to engage the attention of the nearest of them by administering them a shove with his elbow, and saying, "Look here, this is my cousin, or something; his name's Bibbus, he's no slouch either!" Which introduction was variously acknowledged by the recipients thereof, with more or less disconcerting facetiousness. One young gentleman got upon a chair to

bow. Another, after gravely shaking hands with himself, fainted away in the arms of his delighted companions. But I was most attracted by the appearance and actions of one youth, who had strolled up with his hands in his pockets (and I remarked that his pockets had a sagged and baggy appearance, from which I argued that his hands were there most of the time) and was eying me good-naturedly. He was a tall, round-faced boy, with rather a blunt nose but a frank and pleasing countenance. Harold called him Sydenham. Master Sydenham, upon being presented, removed one hand from his pocket long enough to smite himself with a flourish in the stomach and achieve an elaborate bow, after which, with his body doubled, he backed slowly away from me as from the presence of royalty, bowing again at every step. This maneuver receiving the admiring plaudits of the onlookers, Master Sydenham, like many another artist under similar circumstances, overdid the part and came to grief; for a large waste basket that stood near the master's desk lying directly in the path of his retrograde movement, he backed into it and was completely swallowed, only his heels and the crown of his head remaining visible. The vociferous delight that greeted this catastrophe precipitated the warning bell, and there was an immediate scurrying of the boys into their places. The Doctor came in a moment later, and my impression of the effect of his eyes, as he stood and ran them up and down the benches, every other eye falling beneath them to come up again when his gaze passed on, was of a person running up and down the scale on a piano to try the action of the keys.

The keys working satisfactorily, he made them a speech, or perhaps it would be more correct to say that he spoke to the master loud enough for the keys to hear.

"We have come together again, Mr. Geddes, to resume our labors after an interval of relaxation. We go away to play; we come back here to work. Work is essential to the happiness of man, and here we teach him to know that.

The horse has to be broken to the harness; the river has to be dammed and its idle waters made to turn the wheels of industry; just so, man has to be taught to know the joys of labor. If a man or boy learns readily this lesson, he quickly finds in it his own reward; if he does not learn it of his own accord, we prod him, for learn it he must. No lagging, Mr. Geddes! Now, we have some new boys with us this year. They don't know us and we don't know them. They know what they are here for; they are here to work, and it must be our first care to find out their capacities; to sound them to see how they are equipped for the work they will have to do. We are all of us born with certain capacities, some larger, some smaller, but something we all have at the start; some of us enlarge our capacities considerably during life, others of us scarcely at all. It is for us to find out the condition of our raw material here. Let us apply a simple test. There's a new boy, Brown of Springfield. Stand up, Brown."

Brown of Springfield stood up, a small sickly boy with a pimply face.

"Now, our object is to find out what we have got to supply Brown with in the way of tools before he can go to work. Let us find out, for instance, if Brown has eyes. Brown, tell us some of the things you have seen in your town, something remarkable, something that a stranger would go to look at if he went there."

After some cogitation, during which he examined the ceiling and the walls and the floor with concentrated interest, Brown shook his head feebly and sat down.

The Doctor shook his finger in the air till his cuff rattled.

"Here is a case that needs attention, Mr. Geddes. A lamentable case. A case of defective observation. This gives us Brown's measure at once in one most important particular. Brown will have to be supplied with a pair of eyes. Brown starts out badly handicapped. But we can improve him, I think. Brown will come to my study

to-morrow morning and repeat to me, from memory, the name of every object in this room. There's another new boy over there, Dole of Lowell. Let us take Dole's measure. Dole, what have you got in Lowell that is extraordinary?"

"Please, sir," said Dole, with shrill rapidity, "there's Ben Butler!"

There was a breathless silence in the room, while every boy strained his attention upon the Doctor to try and gauge Dole's success. As I glanced at the master I saw that he had caught the ends of his mustache together and was tugging at them mercilessly.

"Dole has evidently misunderstood the purport of my question," said the Doctor, employing an irony I did not then understand; "my intention was for him to cite something that conferred *distinction* upon his town. However, he has done his best and is excused."

I had seen the Doctor's eye rest upon me more than once, and suspected that my turn was coming and nerved myself for the ordeal. I had determined to cite the Monument, the Navy Yard, and the State Prison, and had them at my tongue's end. As soon as Dole sat down the Doctor's eye sought me again and I knew it was coming, and repeated my three examples over to myself hurriedly.

"Bibbus of Swampscott," said the Doctor, "what have *you* observed at home?"

"I—I beg your pardon, sir," said I feebly, struggling to my feet, "Charlestown, sir; the Monument——"

"Bibbus of *Swampscott*," repeated the Doctor, with extra distinctness, "what have *you* observed at home?"

I was fairly caught. I cast desperately about me but could think of nothing but the treasure Harold had said was buried under the rocks on the beach. That wouldn't do! Suddenly an inspiration came to me, and I told him the ocean, and sat down.

"The ocean, Bibbus," said the Doctor's dry tones, "is not



particularly local to Swampscott, and your reply suggests the desirability of your familiarizing yourself somewhat with its extent. You will come to me in my study to-morrow morning and repeat to me from memory the States of the Union washed by the Atlantic."

Satisfied, I suppose, with having secured two victims, the Doctor suspended this line of inquiry, and after a conference with Mr. Geddes, of which, judging from my own fears, every boy in the room had a moral certainty he was the subject, he took himself off to his study, presumably to forge more thunderbolts.

As the morning wore away I gradually recovered from my early panic. The tasks assigned to me were not difficult, and the kindness shown me by Mr. Geddes and the friendly appearance and behavior of the boys inspired me with new courage and hope. Indeed, as my spirits rose I tried to convince myself that I hadn't really been afraid at all. I tried to look and act like the other boys, and pretended to myself that I was not really a new pupil like Brown of Springfield, who sat near me and whom I completely ignored. By what system of reasoning I imposed upon myself in this way I do not know, but I know that it was not the first time I had used it at a difficult juncture, nor was it the last. I know that if Brown had asked me, point-blank, if this was my first day I would have been indignant.

At twelve o'clock a musical chime sounded from the lower hall and brought our morning's labors to a close. A little later dinner was served downstairs, presided over by the Doctor. There were two ladies present at the table, a white-haired, aristocratic-looking woman, whom I learned was the Doctor's unmarried sister, and Mrs. Parvin, whom I suppose I now learned was his daughter; at any rate, I had known her to be an inmate of his house, though it is not clear to me when I first learned of their relationship. The boys were all very polite to her, I might even say attentive, and in private conversation alluded to her as

"Clara." Indeed, I soon found out that every boy in Doctor Pusey's establishment understood it to be a matter of course that he should be in love with handsome Mrs. Parvin, and some two or three professed to believe that she was in love with them. Harold told me that night, in confidence, that if he did not consider himself bound to Starbright he would "go in for her" himself, a declaration strong in the implication that, if he should, Mrs. Parvin would be his. I did not respond to this confidence at the time and feigned to be asleep. Being in love with Starbright myself, and having solemnly written a vow never to marry anyone but her and dropped it down the fissure in the ledge where the pirate treasure was buried, I naturally did not care to discuss a question founded on the assumption that she was bound to anyone else.

The Doctor's maiden sister, in respect I suppose of her relation to Mrs. Parvin, was known among the boys as "Aunt Kitty," a singularly inappropriate appellation, I thought, for an elderly lady with a classic profile and be-ribboned eye-glasses. Miss Pusey, while not regularly connected with the administration of the school in any particular capacity, exercised a sort of voluntary monitorship over the establishment, partly maternal and moral, and partly scholastic and intellectual. It was vaguely known that she had literary inclinations and was supposed to have written some poetry of a superior quality, though I never knew of anyone who had seen any of it. But she had an effective way of speaking of her authors or reading aloud from them in the schoolroom, on rare occasions when Mr. Geddes would be absent and she was doing substitute duty, that carried an immense weight of authority. She used to read Boswell's *Life of Johnson* a great deal, and I know it to have been the firm belief of a majority of the boys that she had written it herself. A disposition to address the Doctor's pupils as "my friends," and to refer in conversation to "our incomparable Milton," and "our brilliant and lamented Chatterton," eluci-

dates a further point of Miss Pusey's personality that early impressed me.

So much of what I heard about these two ladies, as indeed, of everything connected with the school, was colored by the personal views and opinions of the boys about me, that I believe it to be remarkable that I was able to form any sane ideas of my own, if I did. I learned that Mrs. Parvin had been married when very young to an army officer, who had treated her very ill and finally left her to meet a merited death in a barroom brawl in a western mining town. Of course it was indubitable that every boy in the school should know that the Doctor had sworn that Captain Parvin's name should never again be spoken in his hearing. Sometimes Clara had said, "Father, I love him; let me go to him." Sometimes she had said, "I tear him from my heart; let me never see his face again." More often she had merely bowed her head to her father's stern decision and walked out of the room never to smile again, and from that hour the name of Captain Parvin had never been uttered under the Doctor's roof. What would happen if it were uttered was a matter of opinion. Frank Sydenham said the Doctor would instantly become rigid, as if he were turned into stone, his face turn white like marble and his eyes start from their sockets; then he would suddenly throw both hands up in the air, ejaculate "O God!" and drop dead. Harold thought differently; he thought the Doctor's face would grow black as night, that he would raise his arm toward Heaven and curse the speaker—and that man would go away somewhere and die. I confess that my own speculations upon this subject were a constant torture to me, such as it would not seem possible a boy would voluntarily inflict upon himself. I looked at the sad and handsome face of Mrs. Parvin and wondered if *she* never spoke that name to herself. Then I wondered what would be *my* fate if I should speak it! Many a time, sitting at table and looking across at the Doctor slowly eating his food, have I wondered what he would

do if I should carelessly say, during a pause in the table hum, "So Captain Parvin was killed, was he, Doctor?" I have pictured myself speaking these words and then leaping out of the window and making my escape, and at other times standing my ground with my back against the wall and defending myself with the dishes.

We assembled in the schoolroom again at two o'clock and remained till four, when the day pupils went home. Probably half the boys were day pupils at this time. After the breaking-up bell, Mr. Geddes joined Harold and me as we were going out and walked with us down the garden path to the gate. I shall never forget the kindly words of encouragement he spoke to me there; I shall never forget how he stood bareheaded at the gate and waved his hand as we passed up the road. He knew, as I knew, that, but for him, I should never have entered that gate again.

## CHAPTER IX

### ADOLESCENCE

**A**S my memory reverts to those first days at Doctor Pusey's it oftenest touches and longest dwells upon the figure of Clara Parvin. Always the same grave, attentive face, always the same neat, black-robed figure, she passed daily before my eyes, attending with a devotion I then thought heroic, but in which I now suppose she found the surest refuge for her sorrow, to the humdrum duties of the Doctor's housekeeping. For me, as for all the boys, she always had a smile and a kind word. She was not animated, but she was not cold. There was a serenity about her, in her words, in her manner, in her quiet figure, that stamped her with the dignity of sorrow and the dignity of resignation. She and her aunt were constant companions, and I have often seen them, from the window, walking in the garden together; Aunt Kitty invariably with a book or the leaves of a manuscript, reading aloud, and Mrs. Parvin listening quietly or busying herself with her needlework. The frivolity—if I may so call it—of the older woman afforded a contrast to the reserve and stateliness of the younger that seemed to confuse their respective ages, and the sixty years of the one might better have belonged to the other than her own twenty-five.

Let me recall what other figures were there. There was "Corky" Rankin, a day pupil, and the oldest boy in the school. He may have been fifteen, and derived his peculiar appellation from the popular belief (inculcated by himself) that he had a cork leg. The supposed possession of this enviable good fortune lent him a great reputation in the

school and he traded on it extensively. Perhaps greater success would have been his but for the curiosity of every boy to feel it. But such was the influence of his great age and the harrowing stories he used to tell of the loss of his leg that, among the younger and more timid boys at least, even the evidence of their own senses did little to impair the plenitude of their first willing belief. I had been presented to Rankin a few days after my arrival and heard the tale of his cork leg.

"Feel it," he said, extending that member for my examination. I took hold of it gingerly. It felt like ordinary flesh.

"Pinch it," said Rankin, "I can't feel it; you won't hurt *me*. Ha! ha!" I sunk my nails into the yielding flesh of his calf with pretty good will. I know it must have hurt, but he didn't wince.

"Cork all right, eh?" he said, hopping on one leg over to the wall and steadying himself with one hand, while he eased his limb awkwardly down to the ground, "but I'm getting pretty used to it. I have to take my hands to it to get it started right, before I walk off,—so."

I confess my confidence was shaken by these actions, though I knew well enough that his leg was no more cork than my own. But the credulity of childhood goes far when invited by age, and I would not then have undertaken to swear that his leg was not Carrara marble.

"Yes," said Rankin, as if I had asked a question, "I lost it at Antietam."

I had never heard of the battle of Antietam, so I said innocently, "Was it a railroad accident, sir?"

"Railroad accident!" he roared. "Why, you ninny, is that all you know about the history of your country? Here, Portal, you better take your precious nephew or niece, or whatever it is, off somewhere and teach it something!"

Then there was Joe Riggs, who enjoyed an immense popularity on account of a peculiar proficiency he had attained of spitting through his front teeth. There was Charley

Moore and Charley Rollins, called Big and Little Charley, yet there was no appreciable difference in their size; but everyone knew Big Charley meant Moore and Little Charley meant Rollins. I do not know why. There were "Pickles" Booth, "Tow" Franklin, and "Coot" Richards. Again, I don't know why they bore these names; I doubt if anyone did. I doubt if there was a boy in the school who knew the meaning of the word "Salamander," yet it was the familiar appellation of a boy named George Bronson.

Tom Gesler was the leader of the school at this time; and not because he was the oldest, or the strongest, or the wisest either, for he was none of these; he had none of the qualifications of a leader and was not even particularly well liked, I believe. But this boy had a stiff finger on his right hand which prevented him from doubling up his fist, and for this reason there was an unwritten law that no boy should "pick" on Tom. He enjoyed an absolute immunity, and in time came to occupy, through being called upon to decide disputes in which his infirmity may have relieved him of personal interest, the unique position of arbiter and leader of a score of boys who were his superiors in every way.

But next to Harold I liked Frank Sydenham best of all the boys whom I met here. He was the only boy who came from any distance; his home was in St. Louis, but he had been sent east to live with his grandfather or uncle, I don't remember which, and be educated. He used to tell us of the wonders of the Mississippi, and of the huge boats piled with cotton that plied upon it, and how he had been to New Orleans and back with his father, and had even held the wheel, with the Captain's permission, and run her "most half a mile." Frank's father was a cotton factor, he said, and made many trips down the river, which was the reason for Frank's being sent to live with his relative. When he grew up he was to be a cotton factor too, and travel up and down the river and everywhere. The profits, he said, were enormous; and if I hadn't decided upon anything myself he

would advise me to look into it. He would be glad, he said, to let me in with him "upon the ground floor," and without quite understanding what that meant, I thanked him gratefully and said I would think it over.

If I had at first entertained any doubt as to whether Mr. Walpole's revelation to me, of Harold's anticipated fortune bearing the charges of my education, was known to Harold himself, that doubt was soon removed. His patronage of me was open and proprietary. I did not object to it; it seemed to me perfectly natural and proper. He was the older, and, I fully believed, the wiser, and it was his money that was keeping me. He made no secret of his liking for me, and had already assured me a dozen times that he should set me up in life when he came into his money, and begged me to give myself no concern over the future.

"You're a first-rate little chap, Sumner," he said, "and I'll see you through; you just stick to me!"

I believe that making plans for my future was one of his chief pleasures. He would think them up during the day and unfold them to me when we were in bed, and every night he had a new one. One night he would say, "I've been thinking it over, old man, and I don't know that it would be best after all to marry Alice; she's a turned-up nose."

"Who's Alice?" I inquired sleepily.

"Didn't I tell you? She lives up the road; I've been thinking you might marry her when I come into my money, but we won't decide yet."

At other times he would have me a doctor, driving about in a gig, and on these occasions it was imperative that I should have side-whiskers. I think that it was his grave doubt of my ability to meet this requirement that later led him to abandon a medical career for me and pitch on the law.

"You shall be a lawyer, Sumner," he said, "and make rattling speeches, and I'll come and hear 'em! Never mind the cost, old chap,—I'll look out for that,"



Although I had not learned to like Mrs. Walpole any better, I got on with her fairly well. She paid little attention to either Harold or me, and we came and went pretty much as we liked. As I became used to my life there, it became more and more plain to me that Mr. Walpole was taken little more account of than were the rest of us. Nor was he a man to assert his position. Although I grew to be fond of him I grew at the same time to be sorry for him, and when a child is sorry for a grown man there is usually something fatally lacking in that man. I felt that this was true of Mr. Walpole. What it was I could not say, but there was a forcelessness in him somehow, a weakness in his very good humor that bespoke a defect underneath the likable exterior of the man. I know now that his was a simple, honest nature, too prone to trust in the honesty as in the judgment of others. I think that he met some losses this first winter that I was there. I know there was a good deal of talk about business that I did not understand. I never heard him complain though I often saw him worried and distraught, but Mrs. Walpole reproached him bitterly in my hearing and in the hearing of others. I have heard her tell him his fatuousness would land them all in the poorhouse sometime.

There was a good deal of talk at this time about Mr. Princep's great success in Missouri. I understood vaguely that he had done great things in lead and zinc. It was an era of feverish speculation in western mines, and it was a favorite complaint of Mrs. Walpole's that while everyone else was getting rich in these enterprises they (the Walpoles) were getting poorer, sticking to the leavings of a business that had seen its best days.

"I declare, Randolph," said Mrs. Walpole, "I should think it would make you ashamed to see these people getting ahead of you and our very neighbors flaunting their riches in our faces! There's Harry Princep making them millionaires before your face!"

"I thought you didn't like Princep, my dear," returned Mr. Walpole, with his imperturbable good humor.

"What has that got to do," replied Mrs. Walpole, looking at her husband strangely, "with making money in his companies?"

"My dear," said Mr. Walpole, "my way of thinking is just the opposite from yours. I like Princep but I don't like his companies. I don't deny he's making money for himself and for others; he may continue to do so for some time, but men who know are steering clear of this particular sort of speculation just now."

"Bah!" exclaimed Mrs. Walpole, contemptuously. "Men who know! You're one of them, I suppose! It's men like you, who are afraid to go in for these things when the opportunity offers, that make it easy for the sharp ones to get it all for themselves. They're not begging you to come in, I suppose?"

"Why, no," said Mr. Walpole, making a feint of resuming his newspaper, "they're not. And I really don't see, my dear, even supposing I wished to go in, how it could be done."

"No, you don't, that's just it!" exclaimed Mrs. Walpole, as if that was the point she had been contending for right along. "Yet you pretend that you and Harry Princep are such friends! Stella, will you sit there staring when you see I am about to faint! Ring for Maggie to get the couch ready."

I heard many conversations of this nature, and it seemed to me Mr. Walpole came out of them with ever lessening credit to himself. He showed to best advantage when he declined the controversy and retired into his newspaper, but this always angered Mrs. Walpole and brought on an attack of nerves.

The winter passed rapidly away. Under the faithful tutelage of Mr. Geddes I made rapid progress at school and by the close of the term was easily the best scholar the

Doctor had. It seems a strange thing to me, even now as I look back, that I should have distanced so many of the older boys in so short a time; and I know that I felt scarcely deserving of the praise Mr. Geddes gave me. It seemed easy to me; I was not conscious of doing the amount of hard work that seemed necessary and right in order to achieve such success, yet I suppose I was proud of my position, too. I know that I was, for I distinctly recall the fond imaginings with which I pleased myself. It was no new thing for me to give rein to my imagination, for I had done so from earliest childhood, but it was perhaps at this time that, as it were, I began to incorporate my dreams with my every-day life and live a sort of double existence. Sometimes I accepted careers ready-made, and would imagine myself Napoleon, have done with providing fictitious details and take him outright. But more often I would carve my own career; it was more satisfactory and allowed of greater scope for the death scene. For, after all, it was the lying in the coffin, the pressing about of the throngs of mourners, the solemn tolling of the bells, the sobs of the multitude, the sonorous intonations of the eulogist of the occasion (himself a great man and orator), the gorgeous trappings of death, and the black-bordered newspapers that impressed me most. Although I experienced death in various guises, I rather inclined to being assassinated in the discharge of public duty. On the whole, I suppose I was assassinated more than anything else. When I was a good deal younger even than I was now, and my mother wouldn't allow me to go and sit in Mr. Fall's shop and watch him work, I would be dead straightway and in my coffin. And the neighbors would pass by pityingly and look at me and whisper, "Poor boy, how his mother must feel!" Or, if my father had insisted, in spite of my protests, upon my giving another half-hour to my fractions, the same scene would be repeated, and the people would say in low, hushed tones, "Yes, his father overtaxed his strength; the boy

warned him, but his words were not heeded. How his father must feel!" It is almost past belief how I gave myself up to these illusions. So completely would they master me that my own scalding tears would flow. Neither place, circumstances, nor surroundings had the least check upon my self-consciousness, and I have walked along the sunny, crowded street with moist eyes and heaving breast at the harrowing scene I had conjured up, but perfectly happy.

My new scholastic honors first suggested, I believe, a further detail of elegiac honors, and I began to frame newspaper accounts of my life and death. How I had sprung from humble parentage; how, by sheer force of intellect I had forged my way to the front; how, when still of an age when ordinary men were just emerging into the world, I had attained the highest pinnacle of fame. I related countless anecdotes of myself, illustrative of my wit and learning. I described my personal appearance; massive head; fine, intellectual features; deep, brilliant eyes (if I were a poet, as sometimes, they were tender and dreamy; if a Napoleon, keen and piercing) and square, formidable jaw (I was very particular about this, whatever character I was for the moment supporting), a cross between Edgar Poe and Daniel Webster.

Numberless pictures, busts, and statues of myself I likewise posed for. General Bibbus at the Head of his Army, (a favorite). The Poet Bibbus, (head supported on hand, elbow resting on volume). Admiral Bibbus Going Down with his Ship (not well liked; funeral arrangements inadequate). President Bibbus taking his Inauguration Oath.

I suppose these follies are common to youth, and I am inclined to think have their origin as much in the love of the dramatic and the spectacular as in mere asininity. Howbeit, they marked my first year at Doctor Pusey's and my attainment of eleven years.

## CHAPTER X

### MY FATHER IS NOMINATED FOR A HIGH OFFICE

AS soon as school broke up I prepared to go home, expecting to spend the greater part of the summer with my parents. The amount of packing I did (my wardrobe had grown considerably since my arrival the summer before) would, I have reason to believe, have sufficed for a journey to the antipodes. Observing which Mr. Walpole suggested my limiting my baggage to a clean handkerchief, saying that he thought it probable that my stay would not be prolonged, as he believed my parents contemplated making some changes which would render it necessary for me to return almost at once. Greatly mystified by these words, I abandoned my carpet-bag and several irregular bundles of sea-shells, beach sand, and a live crab in a pasteboard box, which I had intended to present to my mother, and accompanied Mr. Walpole on the train, feeling that it was not a particularly impressive home-coming for a conquering hero. However, Mr. Walpole improved matters somewhat by sending me up from the station in a cab, his business requiring him to repair at once to his office in the city. Thus I had the satisfaction of dashing up to the bookshop, leaping out of the cab, and slamming the door behind me quite in a grown-up, important manner. My father and mother received me with open arms. I was astonished to see that they had changed so little. It seemed to me that I had been away at least half a lifetime, and, I suppose, had expected to find them gray, bent, and tottering with age. That was the condition always of the hero's parents when he returned from the wars; he also had his

pockets full of gold, which he showered upon them, and here I was without even my sea-shells. The whole thing, it appeared to me, was rather shabby. The old bookshop looked (and smelt) the same as when I had left it, but when we went into the parlor what was my amazement to find it piled with heavy packing-cases, and every vestige of the old familiar furnishings gone! Not a thing was visible, save a large map of the United States pinned upon the wall! The yawning door of my little closet beyond showed that room to be empty and bare. The top of one of the largest packing-cases was spread with a cloth; and a few plates, forks and cups, a loaf and a cut of cold meat disposed thereon, indicated that a meal was to be partaken of.

"Why, what's—what's gone with the furniture?" I exclaimed.

My father put his hand on my head and laughed. "All packed away, Sumner," he said, "all but these dishes, and they go in to-night. Sumner, my boy, we're on the move! 'Westward the course of Empire takes its way.'"

I stared helplessly at my father, then at my mother, and then at the nailed-up boxes, and could make nothing of it. My parents going to move? Impossible! They had never done so before, therefore it could not be.

My mother kissed me and pushed me toward the improvised table. "There, there," she said, "let's have dinner, and then we can tell you all about it. Bless his heart, he looks as if he were in a trance!"

We seated ourselves on the smaller boxes in lieu of chairs, and my mother dispensed the viands. But for my perplexity at the meaning of it all I should have enjoyed this manner of eating immensely, as smacking of life on the plains, and it only required a little imagination to suppose a guard pacing before the door with a gun to warn us of the approach of Indians.

"Yes," said my father, with his mug on his knee, looking round beamingly, "our tent is struck; our course is laid;

the order is 'Forward!' In a few short hours we turn our backs upon the—er—effete East and seek, with high hearts and quickened aspirations, the bosom of the—er—boundless West! The same sun," said my father, glancing out of the windows, "will light us there by day, and the same stars (so far as my astronomical knowledge goes) will shine upon us at night. With these exceptions," he added, falling upon his dinner, "we will have no further connection with the City of Boston and its environs!"

I knew enough of my parents to understand that whatever information I might acquire of these matters was to be got at by no summary process of urging or questioning, and, although burning with curiosity and impatience, I forbore to hurry my father, who had come to a full stop and was quietly eating his dinner.

"Your father's decision to take this step," said my mother, after a few moments' pause, "was fully concurred in by myself. It has long been my opinion that the East is no place for a man of your father's peculiar abilities. Bermondsey, you may do me the justice to recall that I have frequently expressed that opinion to you."

My father (with his mouth full) waved his fork in the air affirmatively.

"I take no credit for being original," resumed my mother, "when I make the statement that two persons cannot occupy the same place at the same time. I speak, I believe, conservatively, when I say that there are at least two persons here in the East for every business or professional opening. Now," said my mother, with convincing logic, "one of those persons is going to get left. Need I say that heretofore that person has always been your father? Take this business here," continued my mother, "the book business. It is an agreeable, gentlemanly, refined business; a business, I may say, peculiarly fitted to your father's temperament, manner, and address. Yet there is no longer a living in that business for us. That business has ceased to support us. Now,

what is the reason for this state of things? Simply this: there are too many bookshops. When this truth is recognized, and I believe I can speak for your father as well as for myself when I say we *do* recognize it, there is only one thing consistently to be done, and that is: get out of the book business. Very good, we get out of the book business. What next? We look about us and we discover that every other business, profession, and calling is in the same condition, overcrowded—two persons for every place. Recognizing *this* truth, there is only one *other* thing consistently to be done, and that is: get out of the country!" My mother, having achieved this logical triumph, resumed her dinner.

"What your mother says, Sumner," said my father, it now being his turn, "is very true. The bookshop is—shall I say, played out?" My mother indicated, by an inclination of her head, that he might employ that term with propriety. "Something had to be done. As you may suppose, my first thought was the law. But the law takes time and money; I had neither. Your mother and I went over the ground thoroughly; we held a council in this very room. Your mother sat over there where the sofa stood," said my father, pointing to the spot with the enjoyment of a veteran reviewing an historic battlefield, "and I stood there by the mantel. Sumner, I wish you could have been here to hear that discussion. I am conscious of no egotism when I say that we—er—surpassed ourselves. The result of that discussion is indicated, in no uncertain manner, by these packing cases and by that map upon the wall, upon which you will find traced in pencil the route approximating, as nearly as may be, the course of the—er—setting sun. That course your mother and I are going to follow, how far we do not know, nor, I may add, do we care, our motto being, Due West."

"But what's to be done with the shop?" I demanded.

"Oh," said my father, "the shop, to be sure. I've sold it!"



"Sold the shop, Bermondsey?"

"Lease, good-will, stock, fixtures and possession," murmured my father, with his eye upon the ceiling, "granted, bargained, sold, assigned, enfeoffed, conveyed and confirmed; his heirs, administrators, and assigns."

"Why, who'd buy it?"

"Well," said my father, complacently, "Mr. Hynson *did* buy it!"

That man! I was indignant. What right had he to buy my father's books? I pictured him prowling about the shop in his catlike way, clawing over the stock and smelling out its secrets. I pictured him behind the counter where my father had stood, and sitting in our little parlor huddled over the fire like a great, black bat, and sleeping perhaps in my own closet. I would rather Mr. Jelleff had had the shop, or Mr. Mungiven, anybody but *him*. What business did he have with it? Probably he had cheated my father, too, in the bargain.

"What did he give you for it?" I demanded, aggressively.

"He gave me," replied my father, leaning back on his box and supporting his head on the wall while he revolved his thumbs comfortably in his lap, "four hundred dollars."

Four hundred dollars! It was a fortune! I felt my respect for my father's business ability suddenly increase. My father saw and enjoyed the effect of his words, and smiled away at me delightedly.

"Well," said I, considerably mollified, "it's a lot of money, and will take you—where you're going."

My father's face suddenly clouded and he looked ruefully at my mother. "That's just it," he said, "we need the money for that very purpose and Hynson didn't—have—it!"

"Didn't have it!" I cried. "Didn't he pay you?"

"Oh, yes, yes, he paid me," said my father, hastily, "but not in money, you see. He gave me his note. That is, for the most of it. He gave me thirty dollars in *cash*," said my father hopefully, "which is something, of course."

It was remarkable to see how he brightened up at this latter reflection. "Yes," he said, again refreshing himself with the terms of his bargain, "'thirty days after date, with interest at the rate of six per centum per annum, payable semi-annually, at and in the City of Boston in the County of Suffolk, till said principal is paid, whether at or after said date of maturity.'"

I went to the wall and examined the map hung there. Sure enough a heavy blue pencil mark, beginning at Boston, wound in a zigzag course half-way across the continent, stopping at St. Louis. Although I made no remark upon it, it seemed to me a long way to go on thirty dollars.

During the afternoon Mr. Hynson came in and greeted me coldly. He was not improved in appearance since I had seen him last. His cheeks were hollow, and his face seemed to have grown yellower, his clothes certainly had grown shabbier, and his scanty hair and whiskers had become as limp as his collar. All the time he was there he hovered around, watching my father, and seemed never to take his eyes off him. While my father worked away on the boxes, Mr. Hynson was close by, observing everything. If my father went into the shop, Mr. Hynson was right at his heels. My mother also came in for the same surveillance, and I do not suppose a single article that she packed in her box that day escaped his scrutiny. It was while she was tucking the last of them out of sight that she suddenly remembered something, and looked up with an exclamation.

"Bermondsey," she cried, "I nearly forgot. Fetch me the blue cloth volume at the end of the top shelf near the door."

My father made a wry face at me behind her back and shook his head forebodingly. But he stepped into the shop and brought back the old identical *Ladies' Wreaths*. Mr. Hynson had been right at his heels all the time, and as my father handed the book over to my mother the attorney stretched out his hand and took it.

"No, no, neighbor," he said, "a bargain is a bargain. I bought your stock of books outright; everything was included. You can't carry any of them away."

In an instant my mother was on her feet and shaking her finger under Mr. Hynson's nose. "Do you stand there," she cried, "and tell me you're a man (which, of course, Mr. Hynson had not done)! I'll let you know you didn't buy *that* book; it's mine. Hand it over!"

"It was on the shelves," muttered Mr. Hynson.

"Mr. Hynson is quite right," said my father, quietly, stepping up, "he bought the book with the others, and I will buy it back. How much do you want for it, Mr. Hynson?" My father's fingers were groping in his waistcoat pocket. Dear old Bermondsey! He hated the book worse than poison, but my mother wanted it and that settled it.

"Of course, I don't want to be hard on you, neighbor," said Mr. Hynson, running rapidly over the leaves of the book with his fingers, "but business is business. Still this seems to be merely a book of poems, um-um, do you recall where you got it?"

"I do not," said my father, quietly; "allow me to ask again the value you place upon it?"

"Oh, tut, tut," said Mr. Hynson, closing the book with a bang and tossing it into my mother's lap, "it's nothing I want, I see; take it, take it."

Nevertheless he did not relax his vigilance, and stayed with us until the last box was packed and the last nail driven. In the evening our old neighbors came in to a sort of farewell reception. Mr. Falls, as dusty as ever, and cleaning his iron-bound spectacles on a handful of excelsior; Mr. Jelleff, eying Mr. Hynson askance; Mr. Mungiven, with propitiatory smile.

"Gentlemen," said my father, "you are welcome. Sumner, jump up and let Mr. Falls have that box. You find us—er—limited in point of space, but not, I trust, in hospitality."

Instant and simultaneous protest from everyone that there was plenty of room, Mr. Mungiven observing, that where there was room for the heart to beat there was room enough among friends. A sentiment generally thought to be rather neatly put and highly creditable to Mr. Mungiven.

"Sir," said my father, with a bow, "I am happy to hear you say so. On the eve of what I may call the momentous event—momentous, at least, in my own insignificant history—of taking my departure from the city and State of my nativity, this expression of the sympathy and esteem of my so long-time neighbors is most affecting and—er—agreeable."

"Mr. Bibbus," said Mr. Jelleff, taking it upon himself, with sudden fervor, to reply to this tribute, "me, and others here present, *some* others," he corrected, in pointed allusion to Mr. Hynson, who sat in the corner with his hands folded in his lap, "has knowed you, sir, for a good many year—come summer, come winter—and in all them years we have found you, sir, a—a man and a—a brother. To them as have knowed you in them capacities, and," said Mr. Jelleff, his eye falling upon my mother and then upon me, and growing with his opportunities, "as a husband and as a father, my words is recognized as true words; to them as has *not* knowed you—as knowed you they have *not*," said Mr. Jelleff, with sudden animosity, "let them prove it if they can!—I say, we pity them! Whoever they may be," said Mr. Jelleff, firmly, looking straight over Mr. Hynson's head at the wall, "we pity them and we scorn them! Mr. Bibbus, God bless you, sir!"

"I alluded a moment since," said my father, relieving a rather embarrassing silence that succeeded Mr. Jelleff's remarks, "to Massachusetts." ("There she stands," ejaculated Mr. Mungiven, in a patriotic parenthesis.)

"There she stands. I thank my friend for those timely and memorable words. Whatever misfortunes I have met with upon her—er—soil, I leave it with no feelings save

of regret and veneration; whatever disappointments may have attended my abode here, and though I leave her borders empty-handed and without the assurance of ever having contributed a page to the history of her glorious achievements, I say here to the sons of Massachusetts, as I shall dare say yonder to the sons of Missouri,—‘Show me her equal in the sisterhood of States!’ ”

These remarks of my father’s were received with much feeling by the company, and it seemed to be the impression that, in thus forgiving the Commonwealth for his misfortunes, my father had exhibited a magnanimity truly remarkable.

“If I may be allowed to presume,” said Mr. Falls, addressing my father, “with the freedom of a neighbor,” my father bowed courteously, “to—to inquire,” said Mr. Falls, wandering a little, “I would like to inquire, that is, if you have settled upon anything to do when you get to Missouri?”

My father received this inquiry with great attention, his arms folded across his breast and his head inclined slightly forward and to one side. “To reply to that question,” he said slowly, “in one word, either by saying ‘Yes’ or ‘No,’ even if I could so reply to it, would not be doing that question justice. I can perhaps best reply to it by saying to you, Mr. Falls, that Missouri is a large State!” The significance of these words, or their obscurity, I do not know which, profoundly impressed all present. Mr. Falls nodded his head gravely to Mr. Jelleff, as if he would convey to that gentleman his sense of the wisdom, sagacity, and far-reaching foresight of my father’s observation. Mr. Jelleff, in turn, nodded his to Mr. Mungiven, and Mr. Mungiven, with equal gravity, divided that mute attention between my father and Mr. Hynson. My father cleared his throat and cast his eyes up at the ceiling, evidently sustaining an inward struggle with his pardonable vanity at having produced such a sensation, and his doubt of the expediency

of risking it by saying anything more. "Shall I add to that," he continued, finally yielding to a constitutional weakness, "that Missouri, peopled with a young and vigorous population, is pregnant with new opportunities, new hopes, new aspirations, and new possibilities? Shall I add that I go there untrammelled by previously formed expectations and unshackled by—er—predetermined plans? I think that covers my position, gentlemen."

Again Mr. Falls nodded his head to Mr. Jelleff, as if to imply that it did cover it, perfectly.

"Because I have engaged in the pursuit here of buying books, maps, prints, authenticated manuscripts, and other bibliographical material, it does not follow that I shall engage in the same business there. I take no such narrow view of the situation. I go there with my mind open, and, so far as the mere human will can determine, unprejudiced and—er—unbiased in my opinions. In that frame of mind, gentlemen, I can best describe my attitude as being one of—er—receptivity. That, I contend, is the proper attitude for a person in my present—er—situation. I may be wrong, but it seems to me, that, in view of my obligations to my family, to myself, and I may add, to society, I would not, at this juncture, be justified—morally justified—in assuming any other."

Mr. Jelleff murmured, "Certainly not," and Mr. Mungiven said, shaking his head with conviction, that it was out of the question.

"Therefore," continued my father, with the satisfaction of a man who finds himself getting on well, "it will be seen how impossible it is for me to reply, *in toto*, to the question which my friend there, with his admirable forethought and clear-headedness, put to me a moment since. Under any other circumstances the practical and business-like considerations involved in that inquiry would have—er—suggested themselves at once to me, but not now, gentlemen, not now! I am a free-lance; I can restrict myself

with no single idea ; I go prepared to weigh, and fully consider, every opportunity that presents itself, whether that opportunity shall be in the law, in railroading, in banking, in commerce, or in any other branch of human industry, even," said my father, with his agreeable smile and a wave of his hand that was not entirely free from self-consciousness, "even in—er—politics! Anything that presents a reasonable assurance of producing an income sufficient, *at first*, even for the *necessities* of life, shall have my attention, except," said my father, with sudden ferocity, "except insurance; I draw the line at insurance!"

Such was the influence exerted over his followers by my father that I have not the slightest doubt that they all felt at that moment, as I felt, that there was something fine in his heroic determination to accept anything in the way of employment that should offer itself, and that any precaution or attempt to secure a situation in advance would have been low, mean, and trifling.

"Being in a sense the successor of Mr. Bibbus here," struck in Mr. Hynson in his dry voice, speaking now for the first time, "though, of course, I can never hope to be so to the extent of assuming the place he so justly holds in the estimation of his neighbors"—this gracious speech must have cost him some effort, for he grasped his wrists tightly with either hand, and held them hugged up to his breast, as he spoke, as if he were holding himself up to the mark till he could get it out—"I am naturally interested in his success in his new field; and it seems to me, gentlemen, that he has inadvertently touched upon a subject to which I would candidly invite his serious attention, and that subject, Mr. Bibbus, is politics."

My father shook his head and laughed, yet I thought there was new interest too in the face he turned toward the speaker. "I mentioned politics," he said, "—if I did mention it—as a sort of figure of speech, crude no doubt, to in-

dicating the wide range of—er—activities in which I was prepared to seek my own vocation.”

“I am aware of that,” replied Mr. Hynson, “and for that reason I invite your more serious attention to it. Politics is a noble pursuit, and it is nowhere better understood or more highly developed than in the West. With your abilities, Mr. Bibbus, your wide range of information upon economic questions, your literary training, and, I may add, without offense, your insinuating personality, I have not the slightest doubt that you would meet with great success.”

I think we were all of us rather surprised at these words of Mr. Hynson’s, and none more so than my father, yet I suppose there was no one else in the room who entertained the suspicion that flashed upon my mind at that moment, that it was Mr. Hynson himself who was responsible for this move of my father’s, and that he was keeping up the game to the last.

“Politics,” observed Mr. Mungiven, looking around with an engaging smile, “is mixed up with shotguns more or less, out West, ain’t it?”

But here my father, who had deprecated the subject when it was favorably spoken of, was ready to defend it when assailed. “I am not aware that that is the case, Mr. Mungiven,” he said, with some sharpness; “any contest which engages the competitive efforts of men is sure, among all people and in all countries, to engender, in some degree, bitterness and passion. Politics is no exception. If, in some parts of our country, such contests are peculiarly warm, sometimes leading to—er—personal encounters, it only proves the keen interest of those people in questions which affect their well-being and prosperity, and it is a good sign. Among such people the institutions of our country are safe.”

“If you will permit *me*, gentlemen,” said my mother, at this point, “I would like to add my word—however slight its influence—to what has been said upon the subject of



politics. It is not a subject upon which a woman can be expected to venture without temerity, but whatever subject interests and concerns Mr. Bibbus, interests and concerns me. It has long been my opinion, privately expressed on more than one occasion to Mr. Bibbus, that he should bestow his attention upon politics as a pursuit for which nature has, I do not hesitate to say, peculiarly fitted him. I am glad that this subject has been broached and that my private opinion has received such welcome confirmation; for I have no false delicacy about this matter, gentlemen," said my mother, firmly; "I believe that Mr. Bibbus could succeed in politics, and believing that, I think he should push himself or permit himself to *be* pushed. If I had my choice," said my mother, a little loftily, "I candidly admit that I should prefer to see Mr. Bibbus a United States Senator from Massachusetts to a United States Senator from Missouri; but if that cannot be, I instantly sink my choice in the matter; I hope I will never allow my selfish desires to stand in Mr. Bibbus's way. And after all a United States Senator from Missouri is *somebody*, I hope."

Mr. Mungiven was sure of it, even though they were Democrats.

"The word Democrat," said my mother, shaking her head, "has no significance for me. It merely indicates, I believe, a shade of political belief. I am not aware that that belief involves any moral obliquity?"

Oh, none whatever, Mr. Mungiven assured her.

"Very good, I am not aware that there is anything in the tenets of Democracy incompatible with the obligations of a husband and a father?"

Oh, by no means; certainly *not*.

"*Very* good. Then I have no objection to Mr. Bibbus becoming a Democrat if that is necessary to political success in Missouri. Whatever political faith Mr. Bibbus adopts, I have no doubt he will faithfully represent his constituents. And I am not sure, gentlemen," said my

mother, with a grave shake of her head, "that it is not morally *incumbent* upon a person going among a strange people with the object of spending his days there, to adopt their views anyway and sink his own. It is not for a stranger, coming among them from a distant place, to assume to dictate to them what beliefs they shall embrace. Were I a native of that place, I should strongly resent such an attempt. No, gentlemen, my advice to Mr. Bibbus is: do not antagonize the people you are going among; you are one and they are many. If they want a Democrat for their Senator, *be* that Democrat; be faithful to your constituents and they will be faithful to you."

A general murmur testified the satisfaction of my mother's auditors at these remarks, as, leaning back on her box with her hands clasped over her knees to balance herself, she looked around as if to say that she would be glad to hear from someone else upon the subject.

"Mrs. Bibbus has expressed," said Mr. Hynson, "and far better, I am sure, than I could have expressed them myself, the identical views I would have impressed upon our host. Your wife is right, Mr. Bibbus; no false delicacy should be allowed to intervene between you and what is so plainly your proper vocation. I shall esteem myself fortunate indeed if any words of mine should induce you to direct your energies in that direction."

My father was plainly pleased. I saw that; Mr. Hynson saw it. He had made as though he would put the subject aside, had stroked his chin, shook his head, cast his eyes up at the ceiling, and said, "Tut, tut!" but he was plainly pleased.

"Gentlemen," he said, as Mr. Hynson concluded, "I thank you. I will not pretend that your too partial opinion of me does not give me pleasure. I will not pretend that the—er—possibilities hinted at in the field of politics, are not such as would quicken the pulse of any man. To an American there can be vouchsafed no greater honor than

to receive the—er—suffrages of his fellow-citizens. That I have never, heretofore, solicited those suffrages, is well known to you all. I have no doubt that, had I done so, I should have received them.”

“Every time!” enthusiastically from Mr. Falls, to which Mr. Jelleff added, “To the last ditch!”

“Gentlemen,” said my father, laughing outright, “I—I—really I must shake your hands!” There was a rush to shake his outstretched palm. Mr. Falls got it first, and wouldn’t let go till actually forced aside by Mr. Jelleff, who, evincing symptoms of wanting to make a speech, was, in his turn, pushed away by Mr. Mungiven. Mr. Hynson, applauding softly, was content to wait until the last, when he took my father’s hand in both his own and squeezed it confidentially. After that my father kissed my mother and me, and then, amid the clapping of hands, found himself standing on a box and all our upturned faces about him.

“Gentlemen,” he said, his face beaming and his voice husky with emotion, “gentlemen, you overwhelm me! This is the proudest moment of my life. Where again shall I find friends like you? Friends that will—er—rally round me as you are doing and have always done? Nowhere, gentlemen, my heart tells me, nowhere! What success awaits me yonder where I am going, I know not; what honors (if any) I know not; but this I do know, that no honor in the gift of the people of Missouri would be prized by me as I would prize the same honor at *your* hands!” (Enthusiastic demonstration by Mr. Mungiven on the back of Mr. Jelleff, producing a fit of coughing on the part of that gentleman, compelling my father to pause in his remarks till Mr. Jelleff could be restored with a cup of water.) “Impelled by your friendly representations, gentlemen, and urged on by the (I fear) overconfident solicitations of my wife, who, I will say, gentlemen, has ever been as my right hand, I may, or I may not, as circumstances dictate, find myself in the—er—political arena of Missouri. I yield to

you, gentlemen, so far as to make that—er—conditional statement. Once in that arena, my fellow Missourians may, or they may not, choose to confer their suffrages upon me; that is for my fellow Missourians to decide for themselves; but, gentlemen, if they should so honor me—and I beg you to believe it is with the greatest diffidence that I allude to that contingency—it shall be my proud recollection that I first received the nomination at the hands of this caucus—er—I would say, assemblage, of my oldest neighbors. Gentlemen, I thank you.”

As my father descended, my mother threw her arms around him and wept tears of delight and pride upon his shoulders. Indeed, I have not the slightest doubt that she considered him, that moment, as good as elected Senator from Missouri.

## CHAPTER XI

### MY FATHER AND MOTHER FOLLOW THE COURSE OF EMPIRE

**M**R. WALPOLE had dispatched a note to my father in the afternoon, saying that if he (my father) would inform him by the messenger of the intended day and hour of his departure, he (Mr. Walpole) would be at the station to bid him Godspeed, and would there take charge of me again. My father returned word that he would "entrain" at four o'clock the next day and would be happy to see Mr. Walpole there.

We camped that night as best we could; my mother's bed being arranged on two boxes in the parlor, and my father and I sleeping under the counter in the shop. I learned that they had been living this frontier life for over a week, my father having, in an excess of zeal, packed the beds first.

I made one or two attempts during the day to draw out from my father further information concerning his sudden migratory impulse, my hazy understanding of it all having received slight benefit from the happenings of the night before, but I got little satisfaction. When I could get him to speak at all his remarks were more oratorical than lucid. He was ready to tell me all about the Louisiana Purchase, the Missouri Compromise, and Thomas H. Benton, but little else to the point, and I finally gave it up; but I still adhered to the opinion I had formed the night before that Mr. Hynson was at the bottom of it all.

I shall never forget the consultations that took place that day between my father and mother over the map on the wall. Every time either of them had a moment to spare

they would fly to this map and study it as if it were (and doubtless it was, to them) a never-ending source of entertainment and information. There my mother would stand with her chin in her hand, scaling distances with a hair-pin, while my father, armed with a blue pencil, marked out the places where fertile valley or busy stream seemed to promise superior locations.

"My love," my mother would say, intent upon the map, "when you are through there will you step here a moment? I think we were mistaken about crossing the Ohio River at Parkersburg."

Once or twice I was myself called into consultation over a knotty point, and requested to bring the result of my recent studies to bear upon the question of the annual rise of the Mississippi River or the mineral resources of the Ozark Mountains.

I had determined to make one last visit to the cave underneath the sidewalk, if possible, for I understood well enough that when we left that day I should never see the old book-shop more. It was a difficult thing to escape the observation of Mr. Hynson, who was as much in evidence as he had been the previous day, and I had no mind to let him into my secret. However, in the afternoon he disappeared from the shop, and I seized the opportunity to put my design into execution. I was unable to find an end of candle, but remembering that I had usually kept a piece secreted in the masonry wall, I took some matches and quietly slipped back of the counter. The small trap-door was closed but not fastened, and quickly throwing it open I ducked my head and plunged into the darkness, closing it after me; straightening up I felt my way along the stone foundation of the house to the point where the passage opened, with a sharp turn, into the excavation under the pavement, and as my hand touched the angle in the wall I felt for my matches; but the next instant I had started back from the corner and crouched against the wall with my heart in my mouth

and my knees shaking under me; for not six feet away, with his back turned toward me, and bending over the deal box that had been my seat, with a candle in his hand, stood a man! I don't know what I thought, I don't suppose I had time to think; I had only caught a glimpse of the figure, but that was enough to frighten me into a state of collapse down there under ground, away from the sunlight and all human kind. I suppose it was only for an instant that I crouched there; the next I began rapidly to feel my way back toward the door; but I had not taken three steps when I heard a movement behind me and the gleam of the candle streamed into the passage. I flattened myself against the wall and stood still. The light advanced along the passage, preceded by the distorted shadow of the bearer, and from that grotesque reflection, even before the figure disclosed itself to me in the darkness, I knew it was Mr. Hynson! At the same moment he saw me. He started back and the candle nearly fell from his hand. For some seconds we stood thus regarding each other, while I suppose my reflection that it was only Mr. Hynson, that succeeded my first fright, was matched in his mind by the reflection that it was only me.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded at last, advancing the candle close to my face.

"Nothing," I answered, sulkily.

He looked at me for a moment without speaking.

"Huh!" he ejaculated, finally. "So you knew of this place, did you?"

"I knew it before you did!" I retorted, with a sudden jealousy.

"Very likely," he answered, quietly. "I didn't know of it till to-day. What was it used for?"

"It wasn't used for anything," I replied, "except to throw rubbish in. I—I used to read in here."

He put his hand in his pocket and drew out a book. "Then that accounts for this," he said, holding it in front

of me. "Is your father rich that you leave his property lying about this way?"

I looked at the book. It was *Oliver Twist*, and I had probably forgotten it and left it there.

"Come," he continued; "since you are here, show me the place."

He turned and led the way back, and I followed him. He stuck the candle on one of the jutting stones in the wall and drew up the deal box and we sat down upon it.

"My! but you've grown," he said, looking at me. He hadn't noticed it in the two days I had been there.

I said I supposed I had.

"And how do you like going to school?" he pursued, as if we had been sustaining a conversation of this general tone for an hour or so.

I told him, pretty well.

"That's right; stick to your books. Let's see, you're living in Swampscott, I believe?"

Again I limited my reply to a mere affirmative.

"Ah, yes; with the Walpoles, I believe your father said. Quite so. Nice people, the Walpoles."

I pretended to be absorbed in the progress of an invisible rat that was audibly gnawing away somewhere under our feet, and did not answer. He seemed not to mind, and talked right on.

"Rich, too, I believe, and I think I have understood that Mr. Walpole has large funds in trust for his ward—your cousin, isn't he—young Portal?"

I couldn't avoid it this time, so I said, "Yes, sir."

"I thought so. Portal is a pretty good fellow?"

I said, I liked him very much.

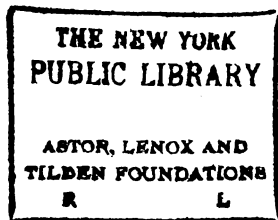
"Ah, that's good. Nothing like congenial companionship for a boy. And if he should take a fancy to you—eh? There's no telling, he'll be rich some day."

He sat on the edge of the box with one leg crossed over





"What are you doing here?" he demanded.



the other, leaning forward over his folded arms, and thoughtfully swinging his crossed leg backward and forward.

"He'll be rich some day," he repeated, with a sidelong look at me; "he'll have a power of money. But he needs to be trained well to handle it; money's a big responsibility. I hope his guardian looks to that. Lets him spend pretty freely, eh?"

I don't know what spirit of rebellion seized me at this moment. I had sense enough to know Mr. Hynson was trying to use me for some purpose. What that purpose was I did not know, but I resolved to defeat it if possible. He shouldn't learn anything from me.

"Oh, yes, sir!" I cried, eagerly, with this impulse upon me. "Harold has all the money he wants. He has a box upstairs full of money, and as fast as he empties it, Mr. Walpole fills it up. He buys, oh, hundreds of dollars' worth of candy, and he bought a—a horse, and a—a sail-boat—and he's going to buy a steam yacht next week," I added, fearful lest I had not drawn it strong enough, "and he had a hat full of gold eagles on his birthday to give away to the boys at school!" I stopped, breathless.

Mr. Hynson turned his burning eyes upon me, and I saw his skinny fingers clutch at his coat-sleeve.

"What!" he cried harshly. "Will the old fool dissipate it all before——"

He checked himself quickly, and rising, paced before me with evident perturbation, muttering to himself, and ever and anon throwing an angry and suspicious glance at me where I sat.

I saw that I had touched him, and determined to try again.

"I think, sir," I said, with affected timidity, "that Mr. Walpole is going to buy a gold mine for Harold."

If I had spoken with an unerring wisdom, and a foreknowledge of things that were unthought-of mysteries to

me then, I could not have produced a more marked effect upon the attorney.

He turned upon me with an exclamation that was like the snarl of an enraged animal. His eyes blazed, his face was livid, and for a moment I thought he was going to spring upon me. In alarm, I jumped up and backed away from him, and as I did so he seized the candle from the wall, and with an oath dashed into the passage, leaving me alone in the darkness. I thought he was gone and drew a breath of relief, but the next instant he reappeared again at the angle of the wall and thrust his yellow face around the corner, while he held the flickering candle over his head.

"Are you sure, boy," he cried, in a high excited voice, "that it was a gold mine? Might it not have been a lead mine? Think, boy, think! Wasn't it a lead mine?"

Although I was frightened at the unexpected result of my mendacity, I had no compunction for him and didn't intend to retract now.

"Well," I said, with an appearance of reflection, "I won't be sure what kind of a mine it was; it may have been lead, or perhaps it was silver, but it was a very big mine," I added, resolved that if I had to relinquish the more precious metal I would be recompensed with size.

"Did you hear any names mentioned in connection with the matter?" continued Mr. Hynson, still glowering at me round the corner, while the fitful light of the candle bathed his blank wall of forehead with a yellow light.

"N-o-o," I replied, slowly, my invention beginning to flag after rejecting a mythical Mr. Smith as the owner of the mine, "I don't remember hearing any."

"Think, can't you?" exclaimed Mr. Hynson, impatiently. "Did you," he said, coming a step nearer, while he dropped his voice to a lower key, "did you hear the names of Princep, or of Frazer & Dahlm mentioned?"

It was my turn to be astonished now, and I suppose I showed it in my face.

"Eh!" exclaimed Mr. Hynson, bending forward eagerly. "Did you hear those names mentioned?"

"N-no," I stammered.

"You lie!" he cried, fiercely, thrusting the dripping candle into my face. "I can tell when a boy is lying! You little devil, you know better!" With his burning gaze fixed upon my face, as if he would read my very soul, he slowly waved the candle over my head, and I had no doubt he was casting a spell upon me, a conviction strengthened in the end by his finally dashing the candle to the ground and stamping it out with a curse. The next moment I heard his retreating footsteps going down the passage.

I waited until I was sure he was not coming back and then groped my own way out. I confess that as I reached the door I had a horrible suspicion that he might have locked me in, but the door opened to my hand and I slipped out into the light, thankfully enough.

I said nothing to anyone about this encounter, and later, when Mr. Hynson reappeared in the shop, there was nothing in his demeanor to indicate that he remembered it himself.

The final preparations for my parents' departure were now completed. We were all to accompany them to the train in a body, our neighbors having closed their shops and assembled in the parlor for that purpose. Mr. Jelleff, in a very high, stiff collar and tailed coat, exhibited a face of such solemnity that poor Mr. Mungiven, who had attired himself in light, gala fashion, calculated to inspire cheerfulness in the travelers, felt himself rebuked, and his subsequent efforts were confined to a stealthy endeavor to cover up his bright spotted necktie under his turned-up coat collar. Symptoms of despondency appearing in my own face at this time, Mr. Falls besought me to "brace up" and promised to make me a "chist" with leather hinges. I thanked him and braced up.

And now the traveling bags and bandboxes had all been

carried out and deposited on the sidewalk. The procession was ready to start; the clock verging on three.

"Now, Sumner," said my father, with briskness, as the escort fell into line at the door, "where's your mother? Run and tell her to hurry, we are all ready."

I ran into the parlor where I had seen my mother struggling with her gloves a moment before, but at the threshold I halted, and drew back; seated on the fender, with her skirts trailing in the ashes and her hat very much on one side, was my mother, and she was reading the *Ladies' Wreaths!*

I looked back through the shop at the waiting group on the sidewalk. My father had stepped back to the curb and stood looking up at the house, while one hand upraised and the other thrust into the bosom of his coat seemed to indicate that he was concluding an apostrophe to the bricks and mortar. I tiptoed to the foot of the stairs, and, after some moments of cautious signaling, caught his eye, when I beckoned to him like the ghost of Hamlet's father. Considerably astonished at this proceeding, I suppose, my father excused himself and hastened down into the shop. I put my finger to my lips, and taking his hand, led him softly across the floor to the parlor door.

My father looked into the room and actually reeled in his tracks. Silently we drew back and regarded each other. No words were necessary between us, we both understood the gravity of the situation, and each knew that the other understood it. My father was pale, but showed great coolness.

"Sumner," he said, drawing himself up, "we must not falter, we must face the emergency! But we must use tact, my son, tact!"

An inspiration seized me. I drew him back toward the street door. "You stay here," I whispered, hurriedly, "and leave it to me. I will bring her out of it!"

"Sumner," said my father, pressing my hand, "I have

every confidence in you, my son. I leave it in your hands," but as I ran up the steps I heard him mutter, "Tact, tact!"

Half-way up the steps I leaped over the iron railing into the narrow area, which was just wide enough to allow the passage of my body, and made my way around to the side of the house where the parlor window opened.

Directly over this window was the iron balcony of the fire escape. I raised myself up by the stone window-sill and peered into the parlor; I could just discern, through the grimy pane, the figure of my mother still seated on the fender. Scrambling up, I rested my feet on the window ledge, and reaching up just managed to grasp the iron rail of the balcony above. I was now ready for my experiment. Holding firmly to the rail above I took a good breath, and, uttering a shriek of affected terror, I dashed both feet through the window sash, leaving my legs dangling in the room. Through the crash of falling glass I heard my mother utter a shriek corresponding to my own, and the next instant she had me by the legs and was crying out at the top of her voice for my father. He came rushing into the room, followed by the company, when I was seized by half a dozen hands.

"I knew it, Bermondsey!" I heard my mother cry. "I told you he would fall from there some day and break his neck, and now he's done it!"

Judging that the situation was saved by now, I allowed myself to be lowered into the room, where my mother immediately seized me and began to search for my wounds.

"I told you so, Bermondsey," she kept repeating as she felt my legs and arms and thumped me on the chest. "I told you how it would be, time and again, but, no, you would not listen to your wife! Where do you feel it, dear?"

With some difficulty I made her understand I was not hurt, and got to my feet again. I had not dared to look at my father. He stood a little back from the solicitous circle that surrounded me, and I could see out of the corner

of my eye that he was rubbing his hands, the top of his head, and the sides of his legs alternately; which were infallible indications, I knew, of a lively but suppressed satisfaction. But as we all passed into the shop again he fell behind the others, and engaging my eye for a brief second he gave himself a hug, and then pointed to me to give me to understand that it was meant for me, at the same time winking and smiling and nodding his head in the most lively and pointed manner. He had already grasped the offending volume and slipped it into his pocket.

We now lost no time in getting under way, merely delaying long enough, at my mother's urgent demand, for me to pace the length of the shop a few times so that she could be assured that my legs were not broken, after which we went out into the street, when my father locked the door and handed the key to Mr. Hynson with a bow.

"Sir," said he, "this act completes, I believe, your enfeoffment of these premises. You are now in possession; my possession has ceased. Even for the brief moment that I occupy these steps while making these remarks, I occupy them as your tenant and by your courtesy alone." And my father, with a sudden sense of delicacy, walked hastily off them and joined the rest of us on the sidewalk.

Mr. Jelleff walked ahead, gallantly escorting my mother. My father walked behind them with Mr. Falls, leaving Mr. Mungiven, Mr. Hynson, and myself to bring up the rear. Mr. Mungiven, who stood in considerable awe of the attorney, found this arrangement so little to his liking that the heaviest and bulkiest bag in the company, which Mr. Jelleff, as major-domo, had assigned to him to carry, became secretly a welcome blessing to him, engaging as it did most of his strength and all of his attention the whole of the way.

Mr. Walpole was waiting for us at the station and had already secured seats for the travelers, an attention greatly appreciated by my mother, as they were in the rear car



and farthest away from the engine, which she considered a good point.

I noticed that as Mr. Walpole came forward to greet us his eye singled out Mr. Hynson at once, and his face betrayed that same puzzled wonder that I had seen there the first time he had seen the attorney. To this was plainly added a look of dislike. My father presented his friends to Mr. Walpole, who shook hands with them all.

"I would have said just now," Mr. Walpole remarked to Mr. Hynson, as the attorney bowed to him, "that your face was familiar to me, but I think I must be mistaken. I do not recall where I have seen you."

"Mr. Walpole's well-known position in the city precludes a similar forgetfulness on my part," returned Mr. Hynson, with another bow; "I have frequently seen you on 'Change' and elsewhere, but I never had the honor of knowing you, sir."

"Ah, doubtless that is where I have seen you," returned Mr. Walpole, carelessly. "I see so many faces."

After we had installed my mother and father in the car, and my mother had counted all her bundles and counted them wrong, and everybody had looked for the missing ones till it developed that there were no missing ones, the rest of us descended again to the platform, where the final good-bys were exchanged through the car window.

"Gentlemen," said my father, with his uncovered head out the window, and very large his head looked under those circumstances and very small the window, "gentlemen, the uncertainty attendant upon my—er—movements makes it impossible for me to claim from you, at present, the favor of your—er—epistolary remembrances. But as soon as I locate—locate *is* the proper term, I believe—I shall hope for that consideration at your hands. In the meantime it shall be my pleasure to communicate to you, at frequent intervals, the impressions I gather of the new country and new peoples I shall—er—see. It shall be my endeavor

to characterize my reports by fidelity of statement, clearness of insight, and—er—freedom from prejudice. That much, I think, I owe to the people I am going among. My—er—animadversions will naturally embrace the political and politico-social aspects of the communities I visit, and I need not remind you that these are subjects requiring a philosophical treatment, to a great extent, if they are to be treated with justice to their importance, and, I may add, with justice to you, who will follow the course of my observations upon them. It is no slight task, but I hope, gentlemen, to be equal to it. I—pardon me, my love, I did not observe that you were there.”

It was my mother, who had popped her head out the other window and essayed to speak.

“I merely wished to say to Mr. Hynson,” said my mother, “if you will pardon my interruption, my love—the train is about to start, I believe—that in my hurry I left a volume of poetry in the parlor. I was reading it when Sumner—stand away from the wheels, dear—fell through the window. If Mr. Hynson will be kind enough to look for it and forward it to me, I shall be greatly obliged to him. It is not the intrinsic value of the work,” said my mother, looking around, “but its associations which induce me to place a very high value upon it. I shall be greatly obliged to you, Mr. Hynson.”

Mr. Hynson bowed and said he would look for it. My father’s eye sought mine, and the slightest quiver of his eyelid alone attested to me his opinion of the result of that search.

“And now, gentlemen,” said my father, reaching his arm through the window, “it only remains for me to shake hands with you all. God bless you. Mr. Walpole, we have every confidence in your kind intentions toward Sumner, and we leave him in your hands gratefully assured that it is for the best.”

As the train slowly began to move, my mother waved her

last farewell and withdrew her face from the window, unwilling that we should see an emotion incompatible with the character for determination which she had established in this enterprise, and it was at this moment that my father, leaning a little farther out, signed to Mr. Walpole, who immediately stepped up and walked along beside the moving car, to hear his parting words.

"Mr. Walpole," said my father, impressively, "we all have some one transcendent quality, sir, and it may be of advantage to you to know Sumner's now ; it is tact, sir, tact!"

We stood watching the train as it pulled out of the station and crept across the trestle which spanned the slip where, in those days, ships came up to receive or discharge their cargoes. As the last car reached the center of this slip my father's face disappeared from the window, and at the next instant a small object shot out into the air and fell, turning over and over with a flutter of white leaves, straight into the water, and sank. The next moment my father's face reappeared at the window, nodding and smiling his last adieu.

## CHAPTER XII

### I MEET AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE AND RECEIVE A MESSAGE FROM THE GRAND VIZIER

THE life which I now began regularly to lead at Mr. Walpole's and Doctor Pusey's, although perhaps the chief formative period of my life, shall occupy the smallest space in this history. It was, I suppose, the life of every American school-boy between the ages of eleven and fifteen. I studied hard and played harder. I read a good deal, and forgot what I wanted to and retained the rest. I was frequently in love and often in other kinds of trouble. The women I fell in love with were invariably old enough to be my mother and as often as not were already married. Youth has a fine indifference for obstacles of this sort.

I came into long trousers and advanced ideas on religion simultaneously. I quit going to Sunday-school, and read Voltaire and Rousseau, because I understood that those writers were, in a general sort of way, brilliant and wicked. But I must confess that I found them unintelligible and even dull. After that I went back to Sunday-school because I was lonesome. And besides, my defection had not produced, so far as I could ascertain, any noticeable falling away from the faith.

Every day the bonds between Harold and me grew stronger. Every day he developed more and more the traits of character I had noticed the first time I saw him when we sat on the rocks and he unfolded to me his defense of Egg Rock,—boldness, self-confidence, masterfulness, and, perhaps, recklessness. Long before the circumstances arose

which terminated both our careers at Doctor Pusey's, these attributes had gained for him the undisputed leadership there—better reasons, to be sure, than had secured it for little Tom Gesler.

At the beginning of my second term at the Doctor's, I think it was, Starbright was sent away to school. It was a famous boarding-school for girls down in Connecticut, and when she went away I was heartbroken. So was Harold, but he didn't show his grief, whereas I paraded mine. I suppose I got more enjoyment out of mine than he did out of his. Starbright promised to write to me every day, and she did so for three days. When her letters ceased it seemed to me there was nothing left to live for, and the depth of my agony was such as to kindle within me an admiration for myself that I had not felt before. This particular phase did not last long and was succeeded by a bitterness of spirit in which I said to Harold all the sarcastic things I could think of about Starbright and all women in general. I felt that there was a gulf between us that could never be bridged, and being required about this time by Mr. Geddes, to prepare a thesis, I chose "Friendship" for my subject, contending eloquently for the Platonic principle, and advancing the proposition that the wiles and machinations of the opposite sex were steadily eating away, like a canker worm, at those sterling and chivalrous qualities of men upon which rested the whole framework of society. I strongly advocated a firm stand being made against this insidious encroachment, and showed what might be accomplished if all men and brothers would sink their individual weaknesses for female companionship, and strike a blow for the common weal. Mr. Geddes smiled when he read my thesis and pulled at his mustache in the old way; he complimented me, however, and said that I had expressed myself very clearly; but I thought, gloomily, that even Mr. Geddes did not realize the seriousness of the situation.

I had heard from my father and mother at irregular inter-

vals during this time, and from widely separated points. The first letter came from St. Louis and was written by my father, and while it contained a rather detailed account of the early settlement and subsequent growth of the Missouri metropolis, together with an exposition of his personal views on the architecture of the Eads Bridge, it did not convey much information about his own situation or prospects. He was, he wrote, "looking over" the situation there, but was not, at the date of that writing, prepared to say what would be the result of his scrutiny. He was inclined to think, however, that the overcrowded condition of the city and the resulting competition in all lines, would determine him to move "further on," for the purpose of more extended investigation before he decided upon a "location." Sometime later he wrote from Kansas City. He had gone there, he said, with a view to "comparing conditions" with those of St. Louis, and on the whole he had about come to the decision that they were even worse there. There was a depression, he said, in business (referable, as usual, to competition) that rendered futile any hope of success there at that time. Nevertheless his letter was full of delightful descriptions of the place, its history, commercial advantages and mixed population, but concluded with the statement that he should be forced, in view of the prevailing "industrial lassitude," which gave no promise of future "resiliency," to "push South," into the mining regions, where he hoped for a better showing. Months elapsed before I heard from them again, and then a letter arrived bearing the postmark of one of the southwestern towns in the Ozark mining region. It was very brief, stating merely that they had "located" there but had engaged in no definite occupation as yet, their efforts in this direction being so far merely "tentative." It was my mother who wrote this time, and she besought me to be under no concern if their letters were infrequent, as my father was making a study of social and industrial conditions with the object of determining what particular line of effort

promised the greatest meed of success, an undertaking that occupied his time and attention to a very great extent. As for herself, while she realized the slight value of her assistance in this work, she was, nevertheless, rendering him such aid as she could, and she hoped I would give myself no worry on their account, as they were well, and "reasonably happy." She did not, she said, find the society there what she had formerly been accustomed to "in the neighborhood of Beacon Street," but she did not wish to complain. She realized that she could not expect it, and she thought it was the duty of persons coming into that country from the East resolutely to put behind them personal tastes that may have been acquired under different circumstances in their former homes, and cheerfully accommodate themselves to their new surroundings. That duty she intended to perform, and she trusted that it could never be said of her by my father's political enemies (when the time came for him to have political enemies), that she either sat and sulked in her tent like Achilles, or bemoaned past glories like the children of Israel in their Babylonian captivity.

I have now to narrate the circumstances from which, looking back now, I date the beginning of the changes which were to come upon us and which exerted such far-reaching influences upon many unsuspecting lives.

Harold and I came home from school one day and found a strange gentleman in the library in consultation with Mr. and Mrs. Walpole. He was a tall, well-formed man, with a handsome brown beard, and he was lolling gracefully in the window seat playing with the curtain cords when we bolted into the room, in ignorance, of course, that there was anyone there.

"Well, upon my soul!" cried the strange gentleman, turning his face toward us as we entered. "The Captain and First Lieutenant! Come aboard, gentlemen."

"Why, Harold," said Mr. Walpole, laughing as we stood in confusion by the door, not knowing what to make of this

remarkable salutation on the part of the bearded gentleman, "surely you remember Mr. Princep?"

It was indeed he! Changed, grown handsomer, but with the old grace and the old languor. I knew him the moment he turned his eyes upon me and held out his hand to us both.

"There, there!" exclaimed Mrs. Walpole, impatiently, when we had shaken hands; "that'll do. Run along and attend to—whatever you have to attend to. We're talking business. No place for boys."

"Oh, don't chase them away," said Mr. Princep, lazily. He was twirling the curtain cord in his white hand and now stopping to turn a handsome ring on his finger in a manner that failed to indicate that the business, whatever it was, interested him very deeply. "I think I've a mesage for the lieutenant there."

I looked at him quickly. He lay back among the cushions and regarded me quizzically. "Let's see," he said to me, "do you know a party, rather large party"—here Mr. Princep threw out his breast as much as possible without disturbing himself in his easy position—"with a good deal of hair on the sides of his head, like Martin Van Buren—you don't know Martin Van Buren, no? Well, this party looks like him, anyway, and has a good deal of collar, a good deal of shirt front, and a double chin. Do you know such a party?"

I nodded quickly.

"Just so. Then there was another party. A party of the opposite sex." He inclined his head gayly toward Mrs. Walpole in mute homage to that sex and waved his hand toward her, so lightly and gracefully and withal so airily combining that movement with the delicate smoothing of his beard, that he might have thrown her a kiss. "A party with most ravishing yellow hair, my special delight I may say, in passing. A most entertaining party; both of them indeed are taking parties. Do you know them both?"

Again I nodded. I would have said something to him, a dozen inquiries about my parents were burning on my



tongue, but Mrs. Walpole's presence restrained me. I could not speak before her. It was a sort of pride, I suppose.

"Just so. You know them both. Well, I am glad to report to you, lieutenant, that I ran across two such parties as I have described, out in my part of the country, and who I have no doubt are the same parties you know, and they are doing nicely and send their love. The large party wished me in particular to convey to you his exhortation to use tact at all times. That is the message; you will doubtless understand its full significance. Both parties are, I believe, very well satisfied with the country they find themselves in, and anticipate, with reason, pleasure and profit from their sojourn there."

He apparently didn't intend to say anything more, and was now whipping his leg with the silken tassels of the curtain, and appeared to have no other object in life.

"I'm sure we're all of us glad to hear your report, Princep," said Mr. Walpole. "We are all interested in—in the parties," he said, smiling, "and in their success. It is quite an extraordinary coincidence that you should have encountered them. They located in your town, I believe?"

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Princep, beginning on his other leg, "one of my towns."

Emboldened by Mr. Walpole's friendly intervention, I essayed a timid inquiry myself.

"Are they—is he," I asked, in diffidence, "in some business, or——"

"Or?" inquired Mr. Princep, blandly, as I halted.

"Or what is he doing?" said I, taking the shortest cut out of my difficulty.

"Well, you see, lieutenant," said Mr. Princep, squaring himself around toward me and clasping his hands back of his head for his greater comfort, "industrial conditions in our country, in that part of the country, that is, that I call at present *my* country, are peculiar. We are all dependent, I may say, upon a single industry. Ours is a mining coun-

try, and we all think of ourselves as being in the mining way, don't you see, although individually Smith may be in the drug line, Jones in the grocery line, and Brown in the lumber line. All these lines are a mere detail of the mining line, however, since they are all supported by it. If the mining line should play out at any time, Smith, Jones, and Brown would play out too. So in that sense, you understand, we are all miners, and if the question is put to me what any certain party is engaged in out in our country, I don't see that I can answer it any better than by saying 'Mining, like the rest of us.' Do you follow me, lieutenant?"

I said, certainly, nothing could be plainer.

"Then," struck in Mrs. Walpole, addressing herself directly to Mr. Princep, "since everyone there is interested in the mines, and working for them in a way, and since you are the chief owner or operator, or representative of the owners, it may be said that everyone there is employed by you. So in that sense, Sumner, the people you are speaking of," said Mrs. Walpole, turning suddenly to me and actually addressing me pointblank, to my great astonishment, "are in the service of Mr. Princep."

I thought Mr. Princep was taken slightly aback by this rather startling conclusion of Mrs. Walpole's logic, but he quickly recovered himself and laughed easily. Nevertheless he had shot a quick, penetrating glance at the speaker before he turned to me again.

"Mrs. Walpole is right, lieutenant," he said, in his self-possessed careless manner, "and I beg to amend my reply to your question to that extent. Our parties—the two taking parties—are at present in my service and doing, as I said, nicely. They send their best love."

Mr. Princep stayed to dinner and the talk was all about Missouri, lead mines, shares, boards of directors, and dividends. Mrs. Walpole was more animated than I had ever seen her. She plied Mr. Princep with questions. She displayed an understanding of company affairs truly remark-

able, and with it all she permitted just enough of her femininity to be seen to make her inquisition charming. Mr. Walpole was gravely attentive.

"Now, if I understand you, Mr. Princep," said Mrs. Walpole, clasping her hands under her chin and resting her elbows on the table, and I thought how fresh and young she looked to-night, "if I understand you, the money necessary to put in operation the plans you were speaking of with respect to this Bald Knob claim, has all been subscribed."

Mr. Princep bowed. "Every cent. My present trip east is for the purpose of submitting my final arrangements for the opening of the claim to the Directors."

Mrs. Walpole pouted. "I declare, Mr. Princep," she said, with a pretty frown at that gentleman, "you business men are the personification of selfishness. Here I have been following up this Bald Knob venture of yours for months, till my head was ready to burst trying to understand it all, hoping that when the time came I could induce you to let Randolph in on it. And now the stock is all snapped up!"

Mr. Princep laughed. "My dear Mrs. Walpole," he said, leaning toward her, "it is easy to see that you are charmingly ignorant of the manifold wiles of the promoter. I said that all the stock was subscribed, and so it is. I did not add, you did not let me, that many of those on the inside who knew the value of the thing, myself among them, took large blocks of it for the very purpose you have accused me of not thinking of—for distribution among their friends. Need I add that to make Mr. Walpole the offer of some of it was the very purpose of my visit here—aside from the pleasure of seeing you?"

Mrs. Walpole's face lighted up with gratification and she shot a triumphant glance at her husband, and Mr. Walpole, feeling that he was called upon to say something, wiped his lips with great deliberation and restored his napkin to his lap.

"I will not deny to you, Princep," he said, "that I have hitherto looked with little favor upon your Missouri ventures—as investments." Mr. Walpole added these last words as a brilliant after-thought to indicate that, viewed in any other light than as investments, the ventures were in the highest degree commendable. "But I will as frankly admit that this Bald Knob enterprise, so far as I understand it, impresses me favorably, and I will look into it, Princep. Yes, I really must look into it further," said Mr. Walpole, arguing with himself. "My dear, Mr. Princep hasn't any fruit."

Mr. Princep stayed, I think, fully three weeks. He had a great many talks with Mr. Walpole in the library and there was a great going over of papers. Sometimes Mrs. Walpole would be present, sometimes not. I know that in my observation of these things it always seemed to me that Mr. Walpole was very eager and pressing at these conferences, and that it was Mr. Princep who was indifferent or reluctant, and was always ready to escape and join Mrs. Walpole upstairs or on the lawn. Mrs. Walpole was always brilliant in his company. He seemed to transform her. She talked and laughed with him like a girl, though she must have been ten years his senior. I have seen her face light up and her eyes sparkle at his approach. All her petulance left her, her listlessness vanished, and she became an animated, entertaining, and beautiful woman. I know that she was a very, very clever woman; that she could think, and reason, and argue like a man, but she had one woman's weakness, and I now think Mr. Princep early discovered it.

But I was puzzled by a change in Mr. Princep himself that I could not account for. I liked him as well as ever; indeed his elegant and manly graces completely fascinated me, and I almost thought, at times, that I would rather look like him than like Edgar Poe. But there was an indefinable change in him somehow from the frank and good-humored boyishness that had won me at the first time I saw him, that troubled me, and perhaps troubled me because I could not

define it. It was not that there was in his manner, at times, a flashiness that was not polish; it was not that in his demeanor there was, at times, a too evident self-appreciation of his power to please; it was not that there sat upon him, at times, a studied skepticism, indifference, and imperviousness that amounted to contempt. But if ever I succeeded in analyzing these things, which I doubt, I think the dominant impression conveyed was that of insincerity. I am not even sure that I got this impression at this time, but if I did it produced no distrust and I doubtless thought it man-of-the-world-like and superior, like everything about him.

When he went away he came down the evening before to take his leave, and I suppose it was only natural, under the circumstances, that the company should get itself into an exclamatory state over him and his successes, or that he should accept their homage as his due and exert himself, if with some condescension, to adorn his station.

"Now, really, Mr. Princep," said Mrs. Biddulph, with her fan in position, "tell me. Are those people out there so,—well, so primitive, you know?"

"Do you mean," asked Mr. Princep, lounging in his chair, "do they shoot holes in people's hats and ride their horses upstairs into the drawing-room?"

Mrs. Biddulph put her fan out of commission long enough to tap Mr. Princep reprovingly on the knee. "You know I don't mean that. But the society, you know. So very mixed, I understand. One doesn't know if one's neighbors are really married, you know, and that sort of thing. Fancy them calling!"

"Oh, I can assure you on that point," said Mr. Princep, coolly; "many of the men out there are married, I know, because they left their wives in Boston. And there wouldn't any ladies call on you anyway, not at first; they'd wait and see if you are a *bona fide* resident, or merely a fugitive from justice who might leave in the night for a more removed spot."

"How you talk! I mean the natives; the people that belong there, you know."

"The natives? The natives don't live there. They all got rich years ago and moved to New York. There's no one there now but poor devils of adventurers from the East like myself. That's what makes the society so mixed, as you say; a mixture from Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, and the drainings from each."

For all his assumed lightness I thought he had given Mrs. Biddulph rather a good thrust, and I think she thought so. But of course she wasn't compelled to show it.

"What nonsense! But of course we know *your* object, Mr. Promoter," said Mrs. Biddulph, archly, again perilously withdrawing her fan from position and shaking it warningly at Mr. Princep. "You may impose upon mere men folk with your lead mines, but you can't deceive *us* about the kind of Society you have there, no, no. *We* know what Missouri is," said the good lady, shaking her head firmly and looking around with a superior smile, "and though we may grant the value of your mines you can't deny that they're *in* Missouri. Come, Mr. Princep," said Mrs. Biddulph, argumentatively, "you know they're in Missouri, they're not in Massachusetts, you know, nor in New York——"

"Nor Connecticut," interrupted Mr. Biddulph, in a low voice.

But Mrs. Biddulph took this interruption very ill, and turning to her husband requested him, with some asperity, to keep his observations to himself. Which Mr. Biddulph did during the rest of the evening.

"Your lead mines are not in Massachusetts, you know," resumed Mrs. Biddulph, with a withering look at her husband, "and you can't make *us* believe that they are among Massachusetts people. You may be a judge of mines, but when you come to Society you have to come to *us*. And I think I can tell you, without stirring from this chair, more about Society in Missouri than your masculine intelligence

would grasp if you spent the rest of your life there. That is my impression," said Mrs. Biddulph, fanning herself with the air of a person who might possibly be wrong but rather thought not.

But Mr. Princep laughed, and lounged, and declined the controversy, which rather disappointed Mrs. Biddulph, I think, who had just begun to think she was getting on.

"Our neighbors have not heard about your fortunate find out there, Princep," said Mrs. Walpole.

"You mean the Grand Vizier and his Master of the Horse?" asked Mr. Princep, lazily.

Mr. Walpole looked at me and laughed and nodded. "Tell us how it came about," he said.

"Why, I believe the truth is," drawled Mr. Princep, "that the Grand Vizier and his Master of the Horse had been in town some time, without connecting themselves in any way with what I may term the industrial life of the place, when I ran across them. I say industrial life in contradistinction, you will understand, to the intellectual life, for the Vizier had identified himself with *that* from the first. But the intellectual life of our town, while yielding to none in tone, refinement, or general elevation, is not, practically speaking, remunerative. Perhaps it is not in any town, outside of Boston, of course. Anyway, the Vizier made this discovery in a short time, and whether it was a mere coincidence or whether it was of economic significance, at the same time discovered that there was no flour in the house. The Vizier, you will understand, while a man distinctly of poetic temperament, is not lacking in a certain aboriginal forcefulness in emergencies. He recognized the principle, so long philosophically expounded, that the world owed him a living, and no shallow, economic sophistry could disguise from his keen and unerring discernment the fact that he was not in receipt of that living. The result of his recognition of that fact was that he appeared in my office one morning, and laid certain propositions before me. I regret that I can give you no

adequate idea of the depth, keenness, and irrefragability of the Vizier's reasoning on these propositions. I should do him injustice if I tried. Premising his remarks with the statement that I was, if not the political, at least the industrial, head of the community, a proposition to which I gracefully acceded, he proceeded to develop the contention that I was responsible for its welfare and prosperity, a conclusion that I was not disposed to admit without limitations. But the Vizier was inexorable. My mines had attracted him there and were responsible for his presence, and unless I was ready to confess false pretenses in their possession and public fame, those mines would have to support him now that he *was* there. He was there ready and willing to work, and unless the opportunity to do so was forthcoming he should consider the contract between himself and society broken. In that case he would not take it upon himself to say what he might do, but it would be something desperate. I think," said Mr. Princep, weary with the effort he had made and gently stifling a yawn with his white hand, "I think he made some guarded allusion to robbing a bank or holding up an express train. At any rate I was so struck with the force of the Vizier's reasoning that I gave him a stool in the office and some reports to copy. The work when it was returned was not only highly satisfactory, but was accompanied by a written memorandum calling my attention to certain infelicities in the phraseology of the copy I had given him, and pointing out how it could be improved. From that moment the Vizier has been a member of my staff, or as he expresses it my *entourage*, and his rise has been rapid. He makes me a written report every night, and so far as I have read them—I am now about a month behind and there is a pile a foot high on my desk—they are models of composition and show a grasp of the details of the Company's business truly amazing. In fact he is my right-hand man, and knows more of my affairs than I do myself. It is not without reason, you see, that I call him my Grand Vizier,



and next to him in ability, understanding, and energy, I rate his able and accomplished Master of the Horse."

Everybody laughed, of course, at Mr. Princep's account of my parents, but I was filled with pride for them. Here was Mr. Princep, who stood next to Napoleon in my estimation, publicly admitting that my father was his right-hand man!

Mr. Walpole had invited Mr. Princep to remain that night and go into Boston with him in the morning, but Mr. Princep had protested that he must take an early train for the West and should go in that night; but later when Mrs. Walpole announced that the morrow was her regular shopping day in Boston, and she should go in the next morning with her husband, Mr. Princep took the trouble to consult a time table, and finding that there was no early train for the West accepted Mr. Walpole's invitation to remain.

The next morning Butch drove them over to the station, and I recall that Mr. Princep, after good-naturedly burdening himself with all my messages to my parents, stood by the wheel with his watch in his hand and asked Mr. Walpole if they would be in time for him to catch the 9:30 Overland Limited, and Mr. Walpole replied, certainly, he would have ample time.

Mrs. Walpole had not returned when Harold and I got home from school that afternoon, which was most unusual, as she never spent more than a few hours in the city, and had directed Butch to meet her usual train about noon time. She had not come on that train, and Butch, after waiting one or two trains, had returned without her, considering, I have no doubt, that his horses were of more account than the lady. However, she came home in a station carriage shortly before five, preceding but a few minutes Mr. Walpole, who had been detained in Lynn, as sometimes happened.

Mrs. Walpole had a heightened color when she came in that very well became her. Although somewhat flustered in her manner, she was in good humor and spoke to me,

## CHAPTER XIII

### I SEE A FACE IN A WINDOW AND ANOTHER IN A HOOD

THE sequence of a train of circumstances leading up to a culminating event often appears, upon a retrospection of those circumstances, to be continuous: just as the declivities in a landscape are invisible in a distant prospect. It seems to me, upon looking back to the time of which I am writing, that the events which followed Mr. Princep's departure, and which brought about the abrupt termination of my career at Doctor Pusey's, transacted themselves immediately; yet I know that nearly two years elapsed between the time Harold and I found Mr. Princep in the library, and the occurrences which opened up, with tragic suddenness, a new epoch in my life and turned me at fourteen from a child into a man.

I know that during these two years my life rolled smoothly along its allotted grooves. I know that I received frequent letters from my father loaded with Mr. Princep's praises, bristling with technical mining terms, and hinting with provoking obscurity at his own expectations ultimately of owning, as near as I could make out, a mine or two of his own.

I know that Starbright came home on a vacation in a long frock and ravishing curls and drove me distracted.

I know that Harold and I, by pooling our pocket money, bought a preparation guaranteed to make the beard grow.

I know that when Mrs. Parvin added to her usual plain black dress a blue neck ribbon, I took it to mean that her period of mourning was over and an invitation to me to speak.

I know that when my voice began to change I thought myself gifted with ventriloquial power, and practiced that art during many patient hours in out-of-the-way places, only giving up when my alarming hoarseness invited the medical attention of Aunt Kitty.

I know that Frank Sydenham went home to St. Louis and remained there, going into his father's office, and that he wrote to Harold and me to take our opinion upon the feasibility of his taking possession of a boat on the levee and sailing her round to Boston.

I know that Mr. Geddes's appearance at school in a new suit was the occasion of a rapidly flying rumor that a relative in England had died and left him a million dollars and a sheep ranch in Australia.

I know that Mr. Walpole aged rapidly and grew to be a haggard old man, and that he strangely took a dislike to Harold and avoided him, seldom speaking to him, and looking at him with a morose moodiness at table or elsewhere when they came unavoidably together.

I know that as his faculties declined Mrs. Walpole's mastery over him increased, that she directed him by her will and swayed him by her judgment in all his personal and business affairs; that at times he seemed to realize his helplessness and struggled against it and submitted by turns; that he wanted Starbright to come home and that Mrs. Walpole fought against her coming home, and prevented it.

I know that more than once my father's letters had contained the information that Mr. Princep had gone east on business, but that he never came to see us, and that Mr. Walpole was ignorant of the fact of his being in the neighborhood; that Mrs. Walpole's shopping trips to Boston occupied, at these times, the whole day, and that she always exhibited on her return the same mixture of high spirits and nervous apprehension that had before marked her manner; that once when I let drop before her the fact that I was aware of Mr. Princep's visits to Boston, she turned upon me

in a passion of rage and menaced me with her clenched hands.

I know that I received a letter from Mr. Hynson asking me to arrange for him an interview with Mr. Walpole, and hinting very plainly that it had better be done speedily or worse might befall; that I was greatly mystified and showed it to Mr. Walpole, who became pitiably agitated and paced the floor before me, wringing his hands.

"Sumner," he cried to me, holding out his shaking hands, a shocking and moving sight, "that man haunts my life! He will dog me to my grave! He wants to ruin me! God!" cried the wretched man, flinging his hands in the air and then covering his face and sobbing weakly, "will nothing deliver me from him?"

I was terrified at beholding the abject condition of my patron, the once proud, dignified, self-reliant man of business. Although I had witnessed, as it were, his daily descent from this position I was not prepared for the revelation of the depth to which he had fallen. I remembered his former meetings with Mr. Hynson and how he had questioned me about him, and how his knowledge of him had been so slight that he could not remember where he had seen his face. And now an insolent note from the attorney had thrown him into a condition of nerveless collapse. What could have happened in the meantime?

I took him gently by the arm and led him to a seat. He made no effort to resist me and sank down, resting his face in his hands, while recurring tremors shook his whole body, as I stood beside him with my hand still on his shoulder.

"Uncle Rand," I said, calling him by that name for the first time in my life, and feeling a confidence within me that was engendered, I suppose, by his own helpless condition, "tell me the meaning of this and let me help you. I hate Mr. Hynson as much as you do. He took my father's shop away from him, and cheated him and drove him out west. But I am not afraid of him. Tell me what to do."

Mr. Walpole silently pressed my hand. "You are a good boy, Sumner, a good boy," he said, "but you can do nothing with that man. He follows me in the street; he forces his way into my office; he sends me letters in the mail and thrusts them into my hand on the sidewalk. I cannot get rid of him, he wants to ruin me; he *will* ruin me!" cried the shaken man, wildly, again springing to his feet and pacing the floor. "Nothing can save me from him but death!"

I had my arms about him, trying to calm him, when the door was pushed noiselessly open and Mrs. Walpole walked into the room. Without a word she motioned me imperiously to stand away from him and, taking him by the arm, led him out of the room. I was still standing thoughtfully on the floor, revolving the meaning of these things in my mind, when Mrs. Walpole returned and confronted me.

"Sumner Bibbus," she said, her eyes flashing and her lips trembling with rage, "you forget your position in this house! Have a care, or the blind dotage that brought you into it will not save you from going out, neck and crop!" She stood quite close to me, her two hands clutching her gown; her face was colorless and she stamped her foot upon the floor as she spoke. "How dare you address Mr. Walpole as 'Uncle'? What do you mean by practicing your fawning arts upon him? You presume to question him, do you, and worm your way into his confidence? You cast-off and deserted little vagrant, you would be in the poor-asylum if you hadn't been brought here, and if you let me catch you sneaking, I'll bundle you out of here to find your vagabond father!" Her rage so choked her that I verily believe that, but for the regular and passionate stamping of her foot, which seemed actually to pump the words out of her, she could not have articulated. "I have had too much of your prying here. I will not have your eyes upon me, do you hear? Nor upon the people who come here. I will not put up with being scrutinized by a common charity charge. How dare you pry into my affairs?"

"I have not!" I cried, hotly.

"Don't you raise your voice to me, sir! I say you have. I have seen your eyes upon me. I will not be scrutinized!"

Nothing but my pride kept my tears back. I would not let this enraged woman see that her words hurt me. I looked her steadily in the face and did not flinch from her. Her fury increased rather than diminished. Her features were distorted and writhing, and I wondered, as I looked at her, how I could ever have thought her beautiful.

"Mrs. Walpole," I said, as quietly as I could, though there were some tears in my voice I knew, and she knew it, and I saw her malicious pleasure at it, "you have always disliked me, ever since I came here. You have no reason for it and I can not help it, but you shall not abuse me or call my father names, for I will not stand and hear you." And turning from her, I walked out of the room. My heart was sore within me, but I did not cry; I was too indignant. I felt that I hated Mrs. Walpole. I felt that it was to be war between us, and I would not be the one to retreat. I felt that she was my enemy, and Harold's enemy, and Mr. Walpole's enemy, and that together we would defeat her and punish her, somehow. It did not seem unreasonable to me, in the bitterness of my heart, to suppose that her husband and all the members of the household would join me against her. Nor would I be turned from my purpose of helping Mr. Walpole. What the mystery was that involved him with Mr. Hynson, and, I suspected, with Mr. Princep too, I did not know, but I was determined to find out if I could. I formed the resolution of going to see Mr. Hynson and drawing from him the object of his persecution of my patron. Mr. Walpole had accepted my sympathy and I would show him that I would stand by him.

I said nothing of my purpose to anyone and, indeed, avoided both Mr. and Mrs. Walpole as much as possible. It was no part of my plan to invite another outbreak on the part of Mrs. Walpole, and, as she took no notice of me, I

was satisfied with the terms of an armed truce. Mr. Walpole went regularly to the city as usual, but he never went away in the morning without plainly showing the haunting dread that was upon him, or came home at night without an air of intense relief.

I had planned my undertaking for a Saturday, when I thought my absence would be least noticed. It was now the summer vacation, and Harold and I often went on expeditions along the shore, occupying the entire day. I therefore counted on my absence not being inquired into. Between my wish to maintain secrecy and a natural desire to invest my undertaking with some forms belonging to enterprises of great pith and moment, as indicated by the exploits of past heroes, I was in considerable doubt how to proceed, but finally wrote a note to Harold instructing him, in case I did not return home at night, to lead a relief party (well armed) to the bookshop, and take possession of it, when my lifeless body would probably be found in the vault under the sidewalk. This missive I left in our room, nailed to the window casing, with a huge chalk-made arrow on the wall, pointing to it.

When I got to Boston I was confused and bewildered by the crowds in the streets and the roar of traffic, and in my anxiety to get quickly away from the station, where I dreaded that I might be recognized by someone coming from the incoming trains, I darted into the thick of the press and was swept along with it, in what direction I knew not. Hurrying across unknown streets, dodging under horses' heads, colliding with hurrying passengers, the impact with whose greater bulk sent me reeling again into the gutter, I soon found myself in a thoroughfare whose aspect was entirely unfamiliar, with no sign of the bridge I knew I must cross, and with a growing conviction that I was lost. As I stood gazing about me in the hope of catching sight of some familiar object to guide me, a cab, driven rapidly from an intersecting street, swung around the corner, and passed

within a foot of where I stood. So close was the wheel to me that I stepped quickly back, fearful of being struck, and as I did so the window came within line of my eye, and I uttered an exclamation, for the face I saw in the window was Harry Princep's! The unexpected sight of him there was surprising enough, but what brought the exclamation to my lips was the look upon his face. A look so frightened, so full of haunting fear, that it came to me long after in my sick nights, and brought the sweat to my forehead. He did not see me, did not hear the cry I uttered. He was huddled up in the far corner of the seat and held a satchel upon his knees, nervously gripping it with both hands, while his gaze traveled straight over my head and searched, shrinkingly, yet with a sort of eager dread, the faces in the passing crowd. I could have put out my hand and touched him! The cab was gone in a second and swallowed up in the crush of the street, but I stood as one spellbound by an apparition, unmindful of the jostling I received from impatient pedestrians, and only aware of the single fact that I had seen Mr. Princep, with a look of terror upon his face, flying as from a pursuing demon.

A sharp poke from a policeman's club admonished me to move on, and, seizing the opportunity to inquire the way to Charlestown, I soon found myself on the right track and nearing my destination, but still turning over in my mind the extraordinary incident I had witnessed and speculating upon its possible connection with the affair I had in hand.

As I approached the bookshop I saw that the shutters were up and thought that Mr. Hynson could not be doing a very brisk trade. I passed down the steps, however, and, pushing open the door, put my head inside and looked about in search of the attorney. The shop was darkened by the closed shutters, but by the light that streamed in the open door I saw that the interior presented a scene of the utmost disorder. The shelves were stripped, and the books lay in confused heaps on the counters and on the floor. Dust



lay thick upon everything, and the air had that moldy and earthy smell that bespoke a long closed and disused room.

As I stood on the lower step, with the door in my hand, taking in the desolation of my old home, I heard a movement in the parlor and Mr. Hynson appeared in the doorway. He rubbed his hands with satisfaction when he saw me, and, for the first time in my knowledge of him, emitted a sound that might have been a laugh. Picking his way among the litter of books upon the floor he approached me and called me by name.

"It *is* Sumner!" he exclaimed, in accents he strove to render joyful. "Well, well, I *do* take this kind of you. My! How you've grown!" he added, offering the same old observation as an original remark. "You're coming in, ain't you?"

I was standing on the step, partly in the shop and partly outside. The fact is, I didn't particularly like the looks of the place; it was pretty dark and decidedly lonesome. However, I couldn't very well refuse the invitation, so I stepped boldly down, but left the door open.

"You're in something of a mess here, Mr. Hynson," I said, with careless ease. "Moving?"

"Oh, no," he returned, closing the door again, "just going over the stock! I *am* a bit cluttered up; come into the parlor." If he had added, "said the spider to the fly," he would have given an accurate description of the situation as it presented itself to me.

I followed him into the well-known room. I knew it would be changed, and it was a relief, I think, when I saw how much it was changed. There was nothing to remind me of the old parlor where we had all sat evenings round the fire, and my father had held my lesson book on his knee while I recited to him the story of the dog crossing the stream with the meat in his mouth, and I was glad that it was so. Bare and desolate as was the shop, it contained only the rickety furniture that had been in the attorney's

office upstairs, with the addition of a tumbled and not over-clean bed.

"This is an honor," said Mr. Hynson, as he seated himself and motioned for me to do the same, "but not wholly an unexpected honor. I had rather looked forward to seeing you soon. You got my letter, of course?"

As he leaned forward and peered into my face his resemblance to a cadaver galvanized into life was certainly horribly real. The man's face was yellow as parchment. There was a drawn look about his small, sharp features and a skin-niness in his neck that made him, with his weedy black clothes, look like a shrunken mummy.

I told him, yes, I had received his letter.

He rubbed his hands together furtively in the sleeves of his coat.

"Good! And you have arranged for me to see Mr. Walpole, eh? You told him what I wanted?" he said, suspiciously, as I remained silent.

"Why, yes," I answered, in some embarrassment, "I—I mentioned it to him, but—but he didn't seem to know what you could want with him."

"He lies!" cried the attorney, fiercely, thrusting his repulsive face close to mine and gripping my wrist with his long, bony hand. "He does know what I want with him! He has had my letters before, and unless he heeds them I'll crush him, do you understand—crush him!"

At each repetition of the word, he crushed my wrist in his hand till I was ready to cry out with pain.

"Tell him that," he said, releasing me and sinking back into his chair, "and see if he says then, he don't know what I want with him!"

I began to wish I hadn't come. That Mr. Hynson was crazy, and that he might at any moment develop homicidal tendencies, seemed the most likely thing I could think of.

"Tell me," he went on, again leaning forward eagerly, and laying his hand upon my knee, "do they parade their

wealth before you? Do they flaunt it in your face? Eh, are they proud, and arrogant, and overbearing to you? Are they?"

I replied shortly that they treated me well enough.

"Well enough, yes; but they are rich and you are poor. *You* don't share their wealth; you are only permitted to see it; *you* are only a dependent, a charge upon their charity that may stop sometime; and when it stops you go back where you were when they picked you up."

I suppose I may have started involuntarily at his repetition of almost the exact words that Mrs. Walpole had used. He noticed it and leaned close to me.

"Ha!" he said, with his searching eyes upon my face, "you know that, you have thought of that; perhaps they have told you?"

I shook my head.

"When they do, you shall have something to say to *them*. Listen, before that time comes you shall see them eat dirt! You shall see them grovel at your feet and beg for the crumbs that they now toss to you! You shall bring them down in the dust where the lowest creatures will spit upon them!"

He ground his heel upon the floor and spat.

Fully believing that the attorney was raving, I pushed my chair back and half rose, but he stretched out his hand and stayed me.

"Listen," he said. "If *he* sent you here for any purpose, to make terms or hear mine, that is my answer. Take it to him!"

"Mr. Walpole didn't send me here, Mr. Hynson," I replied; "he doesn't even know that I am here. I came of my own accord to ask why you sent me that letter;" and I drew it from my pocket and handed it to him. "What right have you to threaten Mr. Walpole and make your threats through me? You are trying to plan his ruin, and have planned it for a long time. I believe that you came

here with that object; I believe you got my father out of the way to further that object. Everything that you have done has been for a purpose of your own, and that purpose is the injury of my friends!"

I stopped, rather out of breath. I had been turning this speech over in my mind as I came along, and, not knowing just how far I could get before the attorney would assault me, I had thought best to put the meat in the opening sentences.

He sat looking at me, slowly scraping his chin with his bony hand and pulling down his under lip and exposing his red gums in a horrible manner. But he said nothing.

"What is it you are trying to bring about?" I continued, emboldened by my success. "What do you expect to gain that will repay you for the risk you run by persecuting Mr. Walpole in this manner? For you must know you can't annoy a man of his position very long; he will have you taken up."

I had already calculated my chances of reaching the door before him and found them in my favor, so I didn't stop to choose my words. I put it to him as strong as I knew how.

He looked at me with a cunning smile. "You're a strange champion for *him*, boy," he said; "but you needn't trouble yourself about me and my risks. Mr. Walpole will hardly have *me* taken up!"

He leered at me with his claw-like hand wavering over his mouth, and I never saw him look so much like a rat. And I knew well enough he spoke the truth. If Mr. Walpole's terror had meant anything, it meant that he was powerless, for a better or worse reason, to touch the attorney.

"See here, boy," continued Mr. Hynson, harshly, "I may as well tell you plainly that you are working on the wrong side. Your interests lie with mine, not with Walpole's. He's as much your enemy as mine, and more; and but for me,

and what I've found out, you never would know it, and he'd see you go down to a pauper's grave. I'm working for us both, and if you don't want to help, then keep out of it altogether, for you can't help *him*. I can ruin him to-morrow if I want to, or I can let him save his skin, and that's the chance I'm offering him. If he wants that chance let him see me, and pretty quick, for I'm about through with *him*! It's for him to say. You make that clear to him, for my next move is the last!"

"Mr. Hynson," I replied, boldly, though there was a ring in the attorney's voice and a hardness in his face that somehow struck a chill to my heart, "I told you that I did not come here from Mr. Walpole, and I will take no threatening message back to him. I do not believe that you can do him any harm, but if you claim to be doing what you are doing on my account, or in my interest, I disown it. It is not true that we have any interests together. Mr. Walpole is not my enemy; he is my best friend and I will help him all I can to defeat your purpose, whatever it is, and to punish you for your vile attacks upon him. And if you come a step nearer to me I'll smash this chair over your head!"

He had started up, with his mean little face blazing with wrath, and taken a step toward me. I swung the chair up in front of me and backed toward the door. Though I was trembling all over, it was not with fear, and I know that my one wish was that he would come at me. I certainly would have brained him.

He stood still and looked at me, and if his purpose had really been to do me personal violence, he abandoned it.

"You little fool," he said, going back to his seat, "you don't know which side your own bread is buttered on. Go back to your Walpoles and eat their crumbs, I don't need your help. But let Walpole look to himself, he's had my last warning!"

I saw that my errand was ended. I had learned nothing, except the reality of the danger that threatened my patron,

which had evidently been plain enough to him before, and I had probably hastened it by defying the man before me. I swung the chair to the floor and backed toward the shop.

"There's one thing, Mr. Hynson," I said, at the door: "if you do anything to Mr. Walpole, when my Cousin Harold comes into his money he will certainly get you hanged!"

And then I ran.

"You little devil!" screamed the attorney's voice behind me, "your Cousin Harold shall eat dirt with the rest!"

I got to the sidewalk as fast as I could and didn't stop till I reached the corner of the str et. Then I looked back. Mr. Hynson stood in front of his door, and as I looked he shook his fist at me. I shook mine back, and with a feeling of exultation at having bearded him in his own den and defied him, though with what result for myself and others, I knew not, I sped away towards home.

Not for several days did the excitement of this encounter with the attorney wear away, and when it did I found that, after all, the startling sight of Mr. Princep's face in the cab had made the more lasting impression upon me. I could not get it out of my mind. That his presence in Boston, in the extraordinary state of mind in which he had undoubtedly been, during the few seconds I had seen him in the cab, was a portent of some sort, I could not doubt; a suspicion which events speedily verified.

Mr. Walpole's business troubles had now reached an acute stage. It was, indeed, a time of recurring crises in the business world. Heavy failures were occurring daily, and, as house after house closed its doors, the strain multiplied upon Mr. Walpole, until it seemed only a question whether final disaster would first overtake his business or his life.

It was during the height of these troubles that I received a letter from my father which roused my worst fears. He wrote that Mr. Princep had been absent several weeks, and that his whereabouts were unknown. He had gone, os-

tensibly, to St. Louis and had been expected back immediately, but nothing had been seen of him since, and inquiry at the places of business in St. Louis where he was supposed to have gone elicited the fact that he had not been there. Great uneasiness, my father added, was manifesting itself in the community, and it was thought that the affairs of the company were not right. He was loath to believe that anything was wrong, but if that should prove to be the case, it meant great hardship for a great many people in the mining districts. He hoped, he said, that Mr. Princep was innocent; he should hate to believe that a young man of such prepossessing appearance and command of language, especially, he might add, a young man who held his own (my father's own) views upon a majority of the questions then pressing upon the American people for settlement, could be guilty of a criminal action. If he were guilty, he hoped—he could not help hoping—that his evil star (to employ a superstitious phrase) would never lead him among the people he had wronged, while in their present temper.

That night in our room Harold and I talked these matters over and I told him what I had seen in Boston and showed him my father's letter. Harold was very thoughtful.

"Sumner," he said, "this means more trouble for Uncle Rand, when it is known. Harry Princep, and Aunt Caroline too, I believe, have between them got him into these western speculations, I could swear to that, though they never told *me*; and I believe Uncle Rand has been counting right along on realizing something from them to help him over his other difficulties. I believe that expectation is all that has kept him going from day to day. When this comes out, it will kill him. That it isn't out yet is what looks strange to me. You know that firm in Boston, Frazer & Dahlm? Well, they are interested in these schemes, and I know Uncle Rand has watched them from day to day, ever since this panic began, and has pinned his last hopes to them. They

have stood so far, and whether they are keeping this quiet about Princep I don't know, but it looks like it. They can't, of course, hide it for very long, and if they go under, Uncle Rand is done for. Mind, nobody has told me these things, but I've got eyes and ears. And now listen, my eyes have seen something else, and I think I can show it to you. Come here to the window, but let's put out the light first."

He darkened the room, and, feeling for my hand, led me softly to the window, where he pulled me down beside him on the seat. The night was cloudy, with a fast-sailing moon alternately revealing and darkening the scene before us; the wooded park and stretches of lawn; the patches of shrubbery, and the hedges lining the garden paths; the white road, the rocks, and the glimmering sea beyond. Our window was in a gable at the side of the house, overlooking the widest part of the grounds, where they stretched away toward the stables and the bramble-covered stone wall. Here, among the trees and shrubbery, stood an old long-disused summer-house or rustic arbor, once inhabited by Butch, and still bearing some traces, in curtained window and stray furniture, of his former occupancy. It was not visible from our window or, indeed, from scarcely any part of the grounds.

"Can you see the path leading to the summer-house?" whispered Harold. "Between the bushes there, just beyond the big tree?"

I nodded, peering in the direction he pointed out.

"Keep your eye on it, but don't put your head out; keep back of the curtain, here."

Very much mystified I did as he directed, and with our faces close together in the darkness we waited, with our eyes riveted on the winding foot-path under the low-spreading branches of the trees, while the scudding clouds flecked all the scene with changing shadows.

Suddenly Harold gripped my arm. I strained my eyes and cautiously advanced my head, and at that instant



muffled figure slipped out of the bushes and, speeding along the path, disappeared in an instant among the trees. It had been visible while one might have counted ten.

Filled with wonder I turned to Harold for an explanation. He shook his head.

"I've seen it three or four times, always about this hour. Twice I have seen it come back. It is always muffled up that way, and I don't know what it means any more than you do; but I think we can find out."

We stood and looked at each other and I could hear my heart beat.

"Shall we try it?" whispered Harold. I could see the excitement in his eyes.

For answer I slipped off my shoes. Harold did the same, and in our stocking-feet we glided downstairs and through the back hall into the kitchen. As Harold fumbled at the fastenings of the door I heard him utter an exclamation, but the next instant he had opened it, and, stepping softly out, we quickly gained the shadow of the hedge. The cool, close-cropped carpet of grass felt good to our feet, and as we crept along the hedge, bent double and scarcely breathing, I felt that a detective's life was the life for me.

The large clumps of bushes we had seen from the window, between which lay the path followed by the mysterious night walker, afforded the shelter we sought, and reaching these we took up our station behind their thick, leafy branches and waited.

I don't know what I expected. The brief glimpse I had caught of the figure from the window had given me no glimmering of suspicion as to its identity; and even had it done so, the mystery of its nocturnal visits to the park would have been no less deep. What object could they have? And did that object concern anyone under Mr. Walpole's roof? I know that as we stood crouching in the shadow, peering with eager and half-fearful eyes down the darkened path, some such thoughts as these flashed

through my brain, but I made no attempt to answer them, and I am sure that, even if I could have subdued my excitement, and tried to reason upon them, I could not have formed even a suspicion of what the next few minutes revealed to my startled senses as the truth.

That revelation was as sudden and complete as it was startling. For as we gazed down the path, our heads touching before the leafy openings in our thickly-woven screen, a swift tread on the grass and a quick rustling of the low-hanging branches of the tree that stood opposite to us, were the only warnings we had, and that moment the figure of a woman stepped quickly into the path, not an arm's length from where we crouched, and glided past us toward the house. And that instant the racing moon revealed to us the white and hooded face of Mrs. Walpole!

## CHAPTER XIV

### I COME INTO MY FORTUNE

**H**AROLD and I stood as if rooted to the spot, and gazed after the swiftly moving figure until it disappeared round the corner of the house, when we turned our wondering faces toward each other. As I looked into Harold's, I saw the stupefaction there give way to a changed expression, an expression that seemed not to belong to a boy's face, certainly not to his, upon whose rather careless and good-natured features I had never looked to see the grave thoughtfulness, even sternness, that was plainly written there now. Even when he spoke, there was that in his tones that indicated the soberness that had come over him.

"Sumner," he said, "have you noticed that there is considerable dew on the grass?"

I was obliged to confess that I had; my stockings were wet through.

"As it wouldn't be very comfortable to spend the rest of the night here under this bush, perhaps you can tell me how we are to get into the house."

"Why, we can go in the way we came out, can't we?"

Harold gave a short laugh. "That door had already been used to-night before us; I found the lock thrown back. Aunt Caroline has gone in that way and locked it after her. We're locked out!"

Harold was right; when we tried the door we found it fast.

"Well," he said, when we had demonstrated the impossibility of getting into the house through any ordinary

means, "there's only one thing to be done; we'll rouse up Butch and make him let us sleep in the stable."

"Why not in the summer-house," I suggested; "we can get in there without even Butch knowing we are out."

Harold looked at me strangely and shook his head. "No," he said, "we'll sleep in the stable." Which we did, and if Butch doubted the story we told him of having been away with a sailing party and got locked out, he didn't express it to us.

I surmised that Harold's abrupt turning from the question that had taken us into the garden, and his refusal to say a word about the matter even after we were safely bedded by Butch in the clean, sweet-smelling hay in the loft, meant that he had been completely deceived in whatever conjecture he had formed, and wanted time to think the matter out in the new light we had received. He preserved the same silence all the next day, but toward night, having apparently rearranged his ideas, he again became communicative.

"Look here," he said; "if she gives us another chance to-night, I want to make sure on one point that I am in doubt about. After that I think I'll know the meaning of this thing."

"You mean you want to follow her again to-night?"

He nodded. "I want to see where she goes. I think I know, but I want to make sure."

Accordingly, when we went to our room at the usual hour, we put out the light, but instead of going to bed, waited in our stocking-feet until the rest of the household had retired, when we slipped downstairs again and out the kitchen door, locking it after us.

It was far from comfortable waiting in the cramped positions we were obliged to occupy among the close-grown bushes, and the time passed slowly. Harold sat with his chin on his knees staring at the ground, only breaking the silence by asking me now and then, in a whisper, if I knew

on what street it was I had seen Mr. Princep in the cab, or in what direction he was going, and whether he was coming from the railway station or going toward it; on none of which points was I able to give him much information.

The distant bells in Lynn had tolled for eleven o'clock, and still Mrs. Walpole had given no sign of an intention to walk that night.

"Do you think she will come?" I whispered to Harold.

He nodded. "I think she'll come, and I think she'll have something with her this time."

I gazed at him wonderingly. I felt the same sudden respect for his infallible discernment that I had experienced before, when he described to Starbright and me the burial of the pirate treasure. I was too much impressed to question him further, and for another half-hour we sat in silence, listening to the myriad voices of the night. Then Harold moved softly and pulled himself up on one knee.

"She's coming!" he whispered, with his hand upon my shoulder. "Don't move; wait till she passes."

I heard her quick footfall upon the gravel path and a moment later I saw her between the leaves as she hurried past, and, sure enough, she carried a basket in her hand. I could not forbear an admiring glance at Harold. He had known that! Harold's hand was still on my shoulder. "Not yet!" he whispered. We watched her until she disappeared in the darkening foliage, the loud hammering of my heart drowning the chirp of the crickets in my ears.

"Now!" whispered Harold. Releasing my shoulder he glided from behind the bush and straight through the trees, leaving the path Mrs. Walpole had taken to our left. I was close at his heels. Our course led us through a thick tangle of undergrowth, untrained vines, and low-sweeping tree-branches, through which scarcely a gleam of starlight penetrated, but Harold held straight on, seeking out the openings with unerring instinct and making hardly a rustle as he glided along. Only once he spoke.

"Hurry!" he whispered, as I struggled noiselessly with a wiry bramble that barred my path. "We must be there before her!"

A moment later we cleared the trees and brushes and came out upon the starlit lawn. Harold put back his hand and pulled me down among the twisted, upgrowing roots of a tree. I peered cautiously out and saw that we were directly in front of the deserted summer-house.

"Keep your eye on the path," whispered Harold; "that's it by the trellis-work; I'll watch the house."

I had not long to watch. My eyes had scarcely accustomed themselves to the surroundings when I caught a quick movement among the leaves of the trellis, and the next moment Mrs. Walpole, with the basket in her hand, passed rapidly up to the steps of the summer-house, and, throwing a swift glance around, laid her hand on the latch. I had nudged Harold quickly, but he had already seen. In his eagerness to see, I suppose, he pressed in front of me, and for a second I lost sight of the figure on the steps, but it seemed to me when I looked again that I saw an arm stretched out from the door, but I was not sure in the uncertain light, and that same instant Mrs. Walpole passed in and the door was closed after her.

Harold rose and stepped back into the shadow of the trees.

"That's all I wanted to find out," he said, in the same grave tones I had before noticed; "now let's get back before we are locked out again."

Whether the remarkable discovery we had made confirmed the suspicions Harold had formed, I did not then learn. Neither did I then know, with certainty, what those suspicions were. While we continued in the same degree of intimacy and companionship, he studiously avoided from that time any mention of the subject, and I was too much under the influence of his moods, as indicating his desires in any matter, to question him. But the effect of these

mysteries upon him was very marked. Heretofore he had met the late repellent attitude of his guardian with complete indifference, when, indeed, he did not choose to ridicule it and counterfeit various emotions of grief, terror, or despair over it. But now he showed the greatest consideration for Mr. Walpole, and, without forcing himself upon him, contrived by many simple acts of courtesy and kindness to show his solicitude for his guardian's misfortunes and his own desire to please. More than any other one thing this transformation in Harold impressed me with the seriousness of these mysteries.

The occurrences which I have related took place in the early days of September, just before the opening of school. A few days before that event Aunt Kitty had signified to Harold, as befitted his position of head boy there, her desire and intention to commemorate the foundation of the Doctor's establishment by asking a few superior people to dinner on the Friday evening preceding the regular opening on Monday. While the guests would be, she said, "grown-ups," she was desirous of having a few of the Doctor's older pupils present, and requested our attendance. Recognizing, she said, the dictum of an eminent German pathologist that the human infant, like all animal young, had a defective digestive apparatus, and also that the function might be wholly moral, she had appointed the chaste hour of half-past four in the afternoon, but would be glad to have us come over in the morning and consult with her and Mrs. Parvin upon the details of the affair, and also to hear a few trifling verses she had put together for the occasion.

We set out after breakfast, on the day indicated, to walk to the Doctor's along the shore. We left Mr. Walpole preparing to go to Boston, and I thought he seemed kinder and more like himself than he had been for a long time, and bade us good-by with something like cheerfulness in his tones. Mrs. Walpole had not taken breakfast with us,

which, indeed, she had not done for some time, and we saw nothing of her as we set out. The morning was beautiful and a cool, delightful breeze was blowing offshore as we made our way along the beach, topping the waves with white and corrugating the hard, smooth sand with a thousand wavy markings. As we rounded the headland which shut off our cove from the long sweep of the shore, we brought abruptly into view a graceful little yacht, painted white and green, lying off the point, only a few hundred yards away. A thin curl of smoke escaped from her maroon funnel, but there was no sign of life about her, and the idle flap of her deck awnings and the gentle toss of her bow were the only movements discernible as we stopped and gazed at her.

"What do you suppose she is doing here?" asked Harold, observing her narrowly. "She don't belong around here. I never saw *her* before."

"Perhaps she's from Marblehead," I hazarded; "can you make out her name?"

"But what's she lying there for, and hulloa! What's that?"

His quick eye had caught an object among the rocks some distance up the beach, and he ran toward it. I followed him. The point was soon settled; it was the yacht's boat—white and green—and it was drawn up out of the water and lay partially concealed among the rocks.

This fresh discovery roused Harold's interest to a high pitch. He walked all around the boat and examined it with minute care, passing his hands along the sides and under the keel, and even laying his palm upon the pebbles where the boat lay. The blades of the oars which lay in the boat next engaged his attention and he felt them carefully, after which he examined the sand where the boat had been dragged from the water. More mystified at these proceedings than I cared to show, I stood by and watched him, and when he came back from the water's edge I shook



my head profoundly, and observed, with my hands in my pockets, that I rather thought we were on to their little game.

"Wha'd'ye mean?" demanded Harold.

"Why, this boat; they've come ashore to bury something, just as you told us on the rocks yonder; that's plain enough. Now, the question is: where did they bury it?"

"Oh, bury your grandmother!" said Harold, testily. "These ain't pirates, you ninny. Come, let's get away from here, we can't learn anything more. But, remember this, will you? If this question ever comes up I give it as my opinion that that boat has been out of water some hours, since daylight, maybe. Now, come on."

When we got to the Doctor's, we found everything in a bustle of preparation. Aunt Kitty, with paper and pencil, was hurrying about making copious notes on the arrangements for the forthcoming festivities and involving herself in all sorts of difficulties respecting who should sit next to whom at the table, and whether ice cream was likely to go well after salad. But Mrs. Parvin seemed to be doing most of the work.

"Now, let me see, Master Bibbus," said Aunt Kitty, biting her pencil: "whom shall we put you next to? You wouldn't care to be next Towsen? No, I thought not; he *does* snuffle. Really, we must have you among the grown-ups, I think."

I signified my acquiescence in this arrangement.

"Very good," said Aunt Kitty, making that addition to her notes and enjoying herself very much in doing it. "Now about—but what's this?" She scrutinized her notes perplexedly and tapped her forehead with her pencil. "'Cox—pudding'—oh, I know. Clara, my dear, Cox isn't to have a pudding—he has nightmare. Now, about the post-prandial exercises. I thought, Master Portal, that as one of the Doctor's oldest pupils it might be a pleasant and agreeable office for you to felicitate him at the proper

moment in a few well-chosen remarks—which I have written out for you—upon his rounding out a quarter-century of scholastic pursuit under this roof, during which time his high educational standard has preserved an even and harmonious—but that's in your speech. What do you say—will you undertake it?"

Harold's reply, while not a direct refusal, conveyed the impression of his unwillingness to comply with Aunt Kitty's request. He intimated that he might do it—in his sleep, or while in a state of mental aberration,—but so long as he remained in conscious possession of his faculties, it was not his intention to do anything in the felicitation line.

"Oh, very well," said Aunt Kitty, moistening her pencil on her tongue, "I shall have to ask Rankin. You wouldn't even read a poem, I suppose?" she asked, with her pencil poised.

Harold was sorry, but his objection extended to poems also.

"Oh, very well," said Aunt Kitty, with a great show of cheerfulness, and checking off that detail from her notes, "I shall have to ask Richards."

Meanwhile, Mrs. Parvin, with quick, deft fingers, was busy transforming the table from its everyday soup-haunted aspect to a smiling bower of blossoms and garlands; arranging the plate, making avenues across the table so the little Doctor (whose nose didn't come much above the top) could see the length of it, and making everything as trim and neat as her own pretty figure.

As the festal hour drew near, the favored ones whom Aunt Kitty had summoned began to arrive; Rankin (limping a little when he saw us), Richards, Townsen, and some two or three others, in Sunday attire and well-brushed hair. Rankin drew us into a corner, and secretly exhibiting a fancifully wrought leather cigarette-case (which he hinted had been presented to him by a person whom delicacy forbade him to name), invited us to have a smoke with him

after dinner. He said he found that a cigarette after dinner greatly aided his digestion. Personally, he preferred a cigar, but his doctor had forbidden him their use except in moderation, and he was obliged therefore to use the weaker substitute; but he thought we would find them of superior quality.

The "grown-ups" referred to by Aunt Kitty consisted, besides the Doctor's household, of a young minister, who speedily got into an argument with the Doctor over something he called "latitudinarianism," between which subject and Mrs. Parvin (whom he made himself very agreeable to—at least he thought himself agreeable, I suppose; I thought him insufferable) he divided his attention; a gold-spectacled and black-bearded gentleman who had sacrificed something (I didn't understand what) to conduct an endowed school in the South for the advancement of poor whites; a puffy-faced and loud-breathing banker from Boston, who had helped endow the school and who looked as if he wished he hadn't; a deep-voiced and masculine-looking woman who taught sociology somewhere; another deep-voiced and masculine-looking woman who taught something somewhere else; and a very little man with enormous side-whiskers and a black ribbon in his eye-glasses whose business didn't appear, except that he was an authority on children like the rest (with the exception of the banker, who was only an authority on the cost of them).

The dinner was as successful, I suppose, as any dinner of this sort usually is, where an overstraining to keep up to the conversational mark supersedes the serious business of eating and drinking. The gentleman who had made the sacrifice took it out on the poor whites; the two deep-voiced women confided to each other their fears that *their* life's work would come to naught and that things would go right back again where they were when they began; the gentleman whose business didn't appear got into a very bitter state over the attitude of School Boards toward

certain text-books he knew of that were vastly superior to the ones in use (possibly the gentleman had prepared them himself); the young minister got round in course of time to the "final phase" of *his* subject and gave himself wholly to Mrs. Parvin and light literature, which he discussed with agreeable condescension; while the banker, abandoning the conversation to the others after making up his mind, I suppose, that, whatever they made out of it, he could buy it and pay for it, gave himself over to the salad.

"Mr. Flint," said the Doctor, addressing the man of money, "try the truffles. I find them very good."

Mr. Flint, who had only just ceased trying them to try the lobster, said he believed he *could* find room for a few, thank you.

"Any late developments in the market situation as you came down?" pursued the Doctor, looking down the avenue where the banker sat.

"I am sorry to say, yes," returned Mr. Flint, shaking his head, but whether over the market situation or because he found himself getting filled up, I don't know. "Frazer's suspension was announced this afternoon. Oldest house on the street." Mr. Flint suspended his fork midway between his plate and his mouth to shake his head again and ejaculate, "Too bad, hard blow," before he completed its journey.

"Is that the house of Frazer & Dahlm?" inquired the Doctor, quietly eating.

Mr. Flint nodded. "Western stocks. Oldest house on the street. Too bad, hard blow."

I looked quickly at Harold. His eyes were upon his plate and he did not look toward me.

The gentleman who had made sacrifices thought that people might make better use of their money than to venture it in doubtful and immoral speculations, anyway, particularly in the West.

"If I am not mistaken," continued the Doctor, deliberately, "that is the house a young man of my acquaintance

connected himself with a couple of years ago. If my memory serves me right, he went west somewhere in their interest. I hope *he* doesn't lose by this."

Mr. Flint looked at the Doctor queerly and then swept his eyes over the faces round the table.

"You don't mean Princep, do you?" he asked, his cheeks swelling.

"Yes," said the Doctor, raising his eyes quickly at the other's tone, "certainly; he is not involved, I hope?"

At the mention of Mr. Princep's name I had felt a thrill go over me. I fastened my eyes upon the banker's face and held my breath.

Mr. Flint's puffy face took on an extra degree of puffiness, and he laid down his knife and fork.

"If Mr. Princep is an acquaintance of yours, Doctor Pusey," he said, with slow-speaking and ponderous dignity, "I am sorry for you, sir. I am sorry that a man of your learning, a man," said Mr. Flint, looking round the table, "who teaches youth and inculcates in them the sacred doctrines of the rights of property, the protection of property, and the inviolability of property, should have to acknowledge even acquaintance with the man I mentioned."

"What do you mean?" asked the Doctor, quickly.

But Mr. Flint was not yet ready to say what he meant, and wagged his head solemnly from side to side, while the very veins on his forehead seemed to stand out in indignation at this state of things.

"No, no, Doctor," he said, as if the Doctor had stubbornly contested the point with him, and speaking in a tone of mingled sorrow, reproof, and grave alarm, "no, no! The minute you touch Property, down comes Society. What is Government for, what is the Constitution for, what are Congress and our State Legislatures for? Why, to make laws to protect Property. That's what we get, sir, for our money paid out to keep Government going. And now you reach out your hand over Government's head, over the Con-

stitution, over Congress and the State Legislatures and strike down Property! That's what you do, sir, when you acknowledge acquaintance with the man I have mentioned. It's an example, that's what it is, a public example you set, tending to demoralize Society by undermining the security of Property. *That's* what I endow schools for, is it?" asked Mr. Flint, exasperated by the discovery. "I'm glad to know what my money goes for!"

"I don't understand you, Mr. Flint," said the Doctor, coldly; "perhaps you'll explain."

Mr. Flint, who had become quite warm, mopped his forehead with his handkerchief. "I give you credit, Doctor Pusey," he said, "for not knowing the facts. If you had known them you never would have used words tending to encourage the weakening of the vested rights of Property." He pushed his plate away, and, with his crumpled napkin in his hand, emphasized his words upon the cleared space before him. "Rumor, sir, has been busy for some time with the name of Mr. Princep in connection with the affairs of Frazer & Dahlm. Not publicly, but in a quiet way, in well-informed circles. This afternoon, following Frazer's suspension, these rumors have got into the papers, still in a quiet way, however, but I think that by to-morrow morning they will have reached the headlines, sir."

The Doctor directed a swift glance toward where Harold and I sat, and I thought for a moment that he was going to stop Mr. Flint. The two deep-voiced women had become quite transfixed in their absorption, the little man with the side-whiskers pricked up his ears to hear if this was anything about School Boards, and even the young minister assumed a look of reproof at what might prove to have been an infringement against church property. The Doctor leaned back in his chair and Mr. Flint went on.

"It has been for some time, in the circles of which I speak, an open secret that Frazer & Dahlm's western

representative had involved them in difficulties. To what extent was not definitely known, but it was generally thought that many of the properties they had taken over upon his representations had proved utterly worthless or even non-existent."

The two deep-voiced women didn't see how anyone would dare. The little man with the side-whiskers withdrew those appendages from the forward position into which he had thrust them, seeing nothing of School Boards here, and they were no longer visible down the line of the table. The young minister, discerning that these were the things that were Cæsar's, resumed his conversation with Mrs. Parvin.

"Frazer & Dahlm will not be the only sufferers. It is strongly suspected that developments will show that this man, trading upon the name of his employers, issued thousands of dollars' worth of these worthless securities to the hard-working people of his community, and even allowed his friends here in the East to put their last cent into them."

Again I looked at Harold, and again his eyes were fastened upon his plate. Two of the boys next me, taking advantage of the preoccupation at the upper end of the table, were filling their pockets with nuts. Aunt Kitty, though with her head inclined with polite attention toward the speaker and preserving a well-kept smile of interest, was secretly consulting her notes under the cloth, waiting for an opening for the felicitations. I observed these things and wondered how they could be, for I had a feeling as of death upon me.

"Three weeks ago, sir, Mr. Princep disappeared from his western post, leaving things in bad shape—how bad was not known until to-day. His firm kept the matter quiet, trying to locate him. He was traced to Boston. He had the effrontery, sir, to come to Boston. There his track was lost, and while the police of every city in the East,

sir, were trying to find him, Frazer & Dahlm were fighting day by day and hour by hour to keep their feet!"

"You astound me!" said the Doctor. "Princep a defaulter!"

"A defaulter and an absconder, sir. He has wrecked the oldest house on the street, a house that *I* did business with, sir, and he has ruined a thousand families from Massachusetts to Missouri! And he had the effrontery to come to Boston, sir!" added the banker, reverting to the strongest count in his indictment.

The deep-voiced woman who taught sociology wondered how much he had got away with.

"It doesn't matter how much he got away with," said the banker, turning his indignant veins upon her. "It isn't the amount, it's the principle! It's the fact that the rights of Property have been invaded. Nobody's property is secure in the face of this fact. *My* property, *your* property is rendered less secure. The very spoons upon this table," said Mr. Flint, picking one of them up, "are less safe!" He laid it down and looked at it steadily as if he rather expected to see it fly out of the window.

Harold had risen and was whispering to Aunt Kitty over the back of her chair. She listened with an air of concern.

"Oh, you must go?" she said. "I'm so sorry. Yes, I know your guardian isn't well. But I did so want you to hear the felicitations. Master Portal thinks he can't stay," she continued, turning to the Doctor; "his guardian isn't well and he thinks he should be home when he returns from Boston. We will have to excuse him, I'm afraid."

"Sorry you can't stay, Portal," said the Doctor. "Glad to have seen you. Monday morning, remember."

Harold bowed and turned to me. I rose and made my bow to Aunt Kitty and the Doctor, and together we stepped softly out the door, found our caps, and fled down the stairs.



It was just sunset. The burnished sky shone redly down in the west and lengthening shadows lay upon the ground.

"Sumner," said Harold, buttoning his jacket tightly about him, "are you good for it?"

"Yes," I replied, drawing a deep breath.

"Then come on!"

Oh, how we ran! Avoiding passers-by, we took the road along the shore and, with lowered heads and compressed lips, raced as for a wager. We ran close together, our elbows touching, and the regular, measured clank of our feet fell together on the hard, smooth road. Those words at the start were all that were spoken. No need of more; we knew what lay before us.

The sun dipped as we rounded the point where our cove came into view, and I threw a swift glance toward the headland where the yacht lay in the morning. It was gone. Of that last sprint down the hill and the dash through the garden gate, I have only the most confused remembrance. But I know there was no thought in my mind, as I am sure there was none in Harold's, of pulling up to consult, or to plan, or to decide, upon anything even at this last moment, so certain were we that what had been impending had happened. I know that I saw Maggie, scared, white, and helpless, standing in the door; that we ran past her into the house; that we ran into Butch with a glass of something in his hand, that he shouted something to us, I know not what, and that we ran on past him, straight into the library.

What I expected to see I do not know. I only know that I was not surprised to see Mr. Walpole there, half-in and half-out of his chair, his head reclining upon the table, and his nerveless arms thrown across the top.

Harold took him by the shoulders and raised him gently. His face was bloodless, but I saw with a rush of relief, that first brought home to me what my real, half-realized fear

had been, that there was life in him. We laid him back in his chair and loosened his collar, and Harold chafed his hands and spoke to him, calling him Uncle Rand and asking him if he knew him. But Mr. Walpole looked at him with bloodshot, staring eyes and did not speak;—made no motion but to swallow, and no sound but to gurgles in his throat.

Butch came in with a glass, in which he had mixed some strong spirits, and we forced some of it between his lips. As I set the glass on the table, Butch motioned me to one side and asked me in a whisper if I knew where Mrs. Walpole was? I shook my head.

"She ain't been here to-day," he whispered; "ain't been seen since he," he motioned to the stricken figure on the chair, "went to Boston this morning. Maggie seen her right after goin' through the trees toward the summer-house, and she was runnin'. Suthin's wrong, young 'un!"

My heart sank within me.

"Something must be done," I said, hurriedly. "We must think of him first. Go right away and fetch Doctor Frazey, and send Maggie here. Don't say anything to anyone. Hurry!"

Butch hurried off, shaking his head and muttering to himself, and presently Maggie appeared at the door and showed her frightened, tear-stained face, but the girl was too much shaken to be of any use. I asked her in a low voice, what she knew of Mrs. Walpole, but she only tossed her arms over her head and became hysterical. Fearful lest the noise might agitate Mr. Walpole, whom Harold's efforts were beginning to rouse, I led her into the kitchen and there, little by little, I got from her what she knew. Mrs. Walpole had kept her bed that morning until Mr. Walpole had gone, when she rose and dressed for going out. Maggie had asked her if she would take breakfast, and she had answered, no, not then, she was going out to walk off a headache. She had gone first down the drive—

way to the park gate, where she stood a moment looking up and down the road, then returning, had taken the path toward the summer-house, and as she disappeared in the trees, ran with her skirts in her hand.

"She's gone clean off!" cried Maggie; "I've been to her room and all her jools is gone. She won't come back no more! And then Mr. Walpole he kem home like a drunken man, and you come running like murder after! What with creakin' on the stairs these many nights, and doors a-clicking to without no hand upon 'em, and the very food a-missing from the butt'ry! I know signs as well as any girl alive, and now it's come! I would wish to give warning to someone, Master Sumner, for no money can induce me, nor yet di'mon's, to keep me here another livelong night!"

I left her and hurried back to the library. Harold had succeeded in restoring the stricken man to something like animation, and he now sat with his nervous, trembling hands clasped in his lap, his blood-suffused eyes roving helplessly about the room, while he strove every few moments to moisten his parted lips with his swollen tongue. Harold, tender as a woman, stood at his side, cooling his forehead with his wetted handkerchief, gently forcing him to take the restorative, and speaking to him soothingly and cheerfully. I drew the curtains and lighted the shaded lamp, and thus we waited for the doctor.

Not a word had Harold and I exchanged since we entered the house, until now, when Mr. Walpole seemed to doze, he stepped softly across the room to my side and questioned me mutely with his eyes. Briefly, and in a low voice, I told him that Mrs. Walpole was gone and what Maggie had seen.

"Sumner," he said, quietly, "Harry Princep has been hiding in the summer-house for a week, waiting for a chance to get away, and Aunt Caroline carried his food to him. This morning they went away together in that yacht!"

As the full import of his words struck me I believe I must have reeled, for he put out his hand and caught me, and that instant we heard the sound of furious driving up the road. Harold's arm was still about me when the rattle of wheels and the plunging and rearing of horses came to the door. It was still about me when there came a rush of feet across the wide veranda, and the crash of the wide-flung door. It was still about me when that rush came toward us along the passage, and the library door was dashed open and the livid face of Mr. Hynson confronted us!

I gave a cry and ran to Mr. Walpole, and stood in front of him. Harold was at my side in an instant and each of us laid a hand upon those bowed shoulders.

The attorney had the look of a man bereft of his senses. His face was the color of no living face that I had ever seen. His eyes glared with the leaping fires of insanity, and foam stood on his lips. In his hand he held a folded yellow paper, and as he stood he raised his arm and shook it in our faces. Again and again he tried to articulate, but his lips could not form the words, and he could only stand and writhe his horrible face at us and shake the paper in his clenched hand.

Mr. Walpole's roving eyes had met that dreaded face the moment it appeared at the door, and even as Harold and I laid our hands upon his shoulders he struggled to rise. With a strength we had not dreamed was in that trembling form he rose from his chair, as with our arms about him we strove to keep him in his seat, and stood facing the attorney.

"Mr. Hynson," he said, thickly, raising his shaking hand and pointing at the paper which the attorney still waved impotently in the air, "if that is Richard Sumner's will you are just too late. Every cent of the trust funds were in Princep's hands, and Princep—has—gone—to—Hell!"

He tottered, and with his hand still outstretched, point-

ing to the waving paper, he escaped our hands and fell senseless to the floor.

With a bound Mr. Hynson leaped over his prostrate body, and raising his arms flung the paper full in my face, so that I staggered back, blinded.

"There," he yelled, "is your inheritance; take it, for you, you fool, were Richard Sumner's heir!"

## CHAPTER XV

I COME OUT OF MY FORTUNE AGAIN AND START TO FOLLOW A  
BLUE PENCIL MARK

**M**R. WALPOLE hovered for a week between life and death. At no moment during those long days and sleepless nights could we hope that he would breathe the next. At no moment, while that vigil lasted, were Harold and I both absent from his side at the same time. And then, slowly, almost imperceptibly, he began to struggle back toward life and reason. These were the signs I had waited for, and when they came I quietly made my few preparations for the step I had decided upon.

Mr. Hynson had spoken the truth, and the paper which he had flung in my face was indeed the last will of the China merchant, secretly drawn and hidden away, and in it my name replaced Harold's. This was the weapon the rascally attorney had held over Mr. Walpole's head, but he had held it too long, and now it was as worthless for his scheming purposes as for any other.

The events of that night and of the days succeeding seem to me like a dream. When the attorney, after dashing the will in my face with his baffled cry of rage, had run from the house with curses on his lips, Harold and I stood looking at each other over the senseless form on the floor, and with the fateful parchment lying at my feet, until the sound of his wheels died away on the road. Then I stooped and picked up the paper and put it in my pocket, and we raised the unconscious man and carried him between us to a couch. There we were working over him silently when Butch returned with the doctor, who quickly administered restoratives and had him carried to his bed.

I had one piece of work to do which could not be postponed. At any moment it might be too late.

"Harold," I said, as soon as the doctor's attention had relieved us of our charge, "I have reason to believe that Mr. Hynson has written letters to your guardian upon the subject that brought him here to-night. Those letters are probably in his desk in the library. I must have them. Will you help me?"

He asked no questions and we immediately began our search. The desk stood open and it was no small task to go through the papers with which it was filled, which we had to do through ignorance of the appearance or character of what we were hunting for, and more than once I despaired of success. But at last, in a small drawer which we had overlooked, we came upon a bundle of letters, and a rapid glance at the signatures of these proved them to be the object of our quest. I put them in my pocket with the will.

The news of Princep's defalcation and flight, and of Mrs. Walpole's disappearance, broke upon the community next day and struck it dumb. But the losses, and in some cases the ruin, that the greater calamity had brought to so many doors in the neighborhood, drove the lesser sensation into the background for the time, and the truth was, not suspected. Many rumors were rife, of course. Mrs. Walpole, driven mad by her husband's losses, had wandered away in an irrational state. She had not been seen since. She had been seen by her pursuers, but upon their approach had threatened to throw herself into the sea. She had been found in an unfrequented wood, living on berries, and had been placed in a sanatorium. Her lifeless body had been found at the foot of the cliffs at Marblehead. Her lifeless body had been found hanging from a tree in the park. She hadn't disappeared at all, but had shut herself up in her room, melancholy mad.

But the truth couldn't be hidden for long. In a few days

the police who had been following Princep's track, traced him to the neighborhood. A rigid inquiry followed. As Harold and I sat in the sick man's chamber we were conscious that the circle these sleuths had drawn was narrowing day by day, and that our house was its center. At last Maggie's ghost stories came to their ears, the girl had been blabbing of what she had heard and seen, and of a great many things she thought. The police pounced on the summer-house, and were not long in announcing that it had sheltered the fugitive. Indeed, traces of his occupancy were too plain. Food still stood upon the rustic table, and Maggie was clamorous to be sworn to identify a pie and portions of his clothing hung upon the wall. So much was established. And now plenty of people remembered seeing the strange yacht off the headland. At this fresh evidence the police tossed the summer-house aside, as a husk they had stripped from the concealed ear, and pounced upon the yacht. They stripped *her* husk of fresh paint from her; found she had recently been purchased in Boston, and from whom and for how much; found the purchaser was a woman; tossed the yacht aside as another husk, and pounced upon the woman, getting closer all the time to the ear. Woman wanted was of such an age, height, appearance. Did this happen to fit the woman said to be missing from Swampscott? Apparently so. Woman missing from Swampscott a former acquaintance of Princep's; Princep hiding on her premises; food conveyed to him in a basket identified by the girl Maggie; woman left home the same morning yacht disappeared. Very good. They had the ear now, and it was Mrs. Walpole.

My one fear, now that the time had come for me to take the step I had resolved upon, was that Harold would prove an obstacle. In the past few days I had begun to know something of his will, and of the decision and quiet determination that were his, and it was not at all improba-



ble that he had made up his mind in regard to these things and chosen a course as well. But at last, in furtherance of my plan, and when it began to be plain that Mr. Walpole would live, I took him into a corner of the library and read to him the letters we had found, or enough of them to show their purpose. The early ones contained hints only of a discovery made by the writer of which it would be to Mr. Walpole's interest to learn, but the attorney, evidently receiving no encouragement, soon proceeded to insolent threats, and disclosed enough to show that Mr. Walpole had been for some time aware of the existence, or supposed existence, of the will which the baffled blackmailer had finally produced on that momentous night.

"Now," said I, when I had finished, and taking the will from my pocket, "Mr. Walpole, Hynson, and ourselves alone know of the existence of this document, but there is nothing, except these letters, to prove Mr. Walpole's knowledge of it. Therefore," I continued, as Harold looked steadily in my face, "when I have destroyed them it leaves only Hynson and ourselves." And tearing the letters into fragments, I threw them on the ground.

"Of the three persons now in the secret," I continued, putting my arm around Harold's shoulder, "I am only afraid of one."

"Who is that?" asked Harold, quickly.

"You. Hynson is no longer to be feared. In the first place his motive is gone with the loss of the property, and in the second place he has disarmed himself by letting this document out of his hands. I shall never open my lips, and what I want now is your promise to be as silent, then the secret is safe."

"Do you think I will take what belongs to you?" asked Harold, doggedly.

"Dear old chap, you forget, there is nothing. The inheritance, no matter whom it belonged to, is gone. Even if I wished to claim it there is nothing to claim, and all

I ask of you is to say and do nothing to cause trouble for the man who has been a friend to me. He has enough to bear now."

"How would giving you your rights cause him trouble?" demanded Harold. "He is responsible to the heir for his trust, whoever it may be; transferring it from me to you wouldn't affect him any. I can't stand in your way, old man."

"Look here," said I, spreading the will open before him, "I will show you how it will affect him. Every will has an administrator, or executor, or something of that sort."

"Yes; well?"

"Well, under *your* will Mr. Walpole was named as that executor and your guardian. Under this will another person is named for those offices. That means if *this* will was to be put into effect, which it couldn't be, remember, for there is nothing now to administer, a transfer of the estate would have to be made from Mr. Walpole to the person named in this will."

"Well," said Harold, obstinately again.

"Well! Is Mr. Walpole in a position to make that transfer?"

Harold remained silent.

"He isn't, of course, and disclosure would follow. What he wants, what he must have, is time to repair the wrong Princep has done and restore the trust before he is called upon to account for it. You will not be the one to prevent that?"

Harold squirmed and twisted in his seat. His eyes were hollow with sleeplessness and his face was pale, but the look of sternness and determination that had come there the night we discovered Mrs. Walpole in the garden—Oh, how long a time it seemed!—had settled there and become a fixed expression.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked, with ominous calmness.

"Save your guardian from exposure, stay here and let everything go on as before."

"Think," he exclaimed, vehemently, "what you are asking me! How can I stay here in the false position I am in! Nothing here is mine; he knows I know it. He would think me a cur and I would think him—well, I don't know what I would think him. We couldn't look in each other's faces!"

"How do you know," I demanded, boldly, "that he believes Hynson's will to be genuine? What proof has he that you are not the rightful heir, to say nothing of any proof that he can imagine *you* can have that would cause you to feel yourself an impostor?"

Harold waved his hand impatiently. "Why did he allow Hynson to write him threatening letters, then? How did he know Hynson's errand that night and say to him what he did?"

"I admit," I replied, "that these things look bad. But, might it not have been true that Mr. Walpole's knowledge that he was in Princep's clutches, prevented him from even exposing Hynson's claim for fear of his own exposure? Think of the position he was in and the worry that must have been his. He may have been waiting till he was in a position to defy Hynson and disprove his claim. Maybe he saved these letters to use against him when that time came."

"Who is this Hynson anyway, and how did he come by this?" said Harold, evading my sophistry and glancing at the document that lay open between us. "Why, isn't this his name here?"

I nodded. "His name is signed there as a witness. If you had read those letters through—which was unnecessary, what I read to you were vile enough—you would have seen that he was once a clerk in Mr. Sumner's office. When Mr. Walpole first saw him he thought he recognized him, but could not place him. When this will was made by your

stepfather, he was called in to witness it, and thus becoming aware of its existence laid his plans to bring it to light when he found, after Mr. Sumner's death, that an earlier will had been recognized. Convinced for some reason that the missing will had been secreted in a book, and tracing Mr. Sumner's library to my father, he came to our shop and continued his search, finally getting my father out of the way by purchasing his stock. The rest we can easily guess; he found the will and began his persecution of your guardian."

"Whatever Uncle Rand's opinion of it may be," said Harold, in his quiet way, "you and I know it to be genuine. You and I know the place I occupy here belongs to you. All the money that has been spent upon me since I was brought here, longer ago than I can remember, was your money, and while I was enjoying the advantages of it you and your people were living in poverty. And now you ask me to continue this wrong by keeping still and living on here as an impostor. I can't do it, Sumner."

'I had expected opposition, but there was a quiet firmness in his manner and a look in his face that I was not prepared for and knew not how to combat.

"Harold," I said, with all the earnestness I could command, "I am not asking you to continue the wrong, if it is a wrong, for your own profit or advantage—I am asking it for your guardian's sake. The kindness he showed me when he brought me here began long before Hynson made his disclosure, and was prompted by no other motive than the goodness of his own heart and to provide a companion for you. We both owe him a debt of gratitude, but I most of all. I want to repay that kindness now that he has met with misfortune and I want you to help me."

"My dear chap," said Harold, throwing his arm around me affectionately, "I have told you that I don't intend to do anything that will harm Uncle Rand. I am not going out into the street and shout out what I know. I will

keep the secret, but I cannot profit by it. I shall simply go quietly away from here. You will stay, and when the time comes and Uncle Rand is on his feet again and the trust is restored, you will produce your will and step into your own."

"My dear Harold," I replied, calmly, "when I tell you that I have already made up my mind to leave here myself, you will see that you are talking foolishly."

"My dear Sumner," said Harold, imitating my manner and smiling half sadly in my face, "you will do nothing of the sort. You can't go away. That will has settled *your* career; you will stay here where you belong and assume the responsibilities it places upon you. Me there is nothing to keep here, and I shall go off somewhere and make my own way."

"You shall not; I shall go myself!"

"Sumner, you shall stay here if I have to thrash you!"

"Better wait till you're able!" I retorted. "As for the will, I'll show you how I'll assume its responsibilities!" And before he could put out his hand to stop me I had torn it into a hundred pieces.

"What have you done!" cried Harold, aghast. "Don't you know it's criminal to destroy a will? Here, give me those!" He made a grab for the torn fragments I held in my hand, but I eluded his grasp and ran out of the room and out of the house, he following me. I was a pretty good runner and I made straight for the rocks, cramming the pieces of the will into my mouth and chewing them to a pulp as I ran. I distanced him, and when he came up with me I had thrown all that remained of that paper, that had filled the lives of so many people with anxiety, hope, avarice, terror, and disappointment, as far as I could into the sea.

"Are you crazy!" cried Harold, as he stood before me, both of us out of breath and panting. "You've destroyed the proofs of a crime! That's what it amounts to; it was

a crime that handed over to me what didn't belong to me, and kept the lawful owners out of it all these years, do you hear? It was a crime! Do you think I'm going to stand being made a thief of?"

He took me by the shoulders and shook me.

"If it was mine, I had a right to do what I wanted with it, didn't I?" I demanded. "And, besides, you know well enough there's nothing to dispute ownership over anyway. Princep's the only thief, I guess. Catch him before you go handing over what you haven't got."

"You think you're funny, don't you?" returned Harold. "Now I tell you what it is, young fellow, if you think you can play it on me this way, you're way off. I'd made up my mind what I was going to do, and I'll do it. Your chucking your title to your property into the water don't change matters any. You can't put it on me that way!"

"You mean you still intend to go away from here?"

"That's just what I mean."

"Very well. Then I'll go, too."

"You will, eh? Now I tell you what it is; if you come tagging after me, I'll give you the all-firedest thrashing you ever got in your life!"

"Who's going to tag after you? I don't have to go in the direction *you* go, do I? You don't own the road, do you?" I asked, with scathing irony. "Lord! I should hope I wouldn't tag after *you*! More likely it would be you tagging after me!"

"Me tag after you! Hear the kid talk!" cried Harold, appealing generally to the heavens and the sea. "Why, you'd be about the last one I'd tag after, I guess! I shall have something more to do than follow you round to see that you don't step on a rusty nail or get your shirt caught on a paling."

"Never you mind my shirt, sir! Mine is not the only shirt, I guess! You'd better look out for your own. Shirt,

eh?" I said, with a sneer. "You'll think shirt before you're through with me!"

I haven't the least idea why I should have considered these remarks biting, but I evidently did, and so did Harold. They drove him nearly frantic.

"Look here," he shouted, "for little or nothing I'd punch your head, Sumner Bibbus!"

"Punch my head!" I cried, as if I doubted having heard aright. "*My head!* I'd like to see you try it. I wish you'd try it just once! Just once," I urged, as though it were a matter of personal accommodation to me, "try it just once, do!"

But Harold took no notice of this appeal except to snort, and it being clearly impossible for me to let even a snort pass unchallenged, I snorted back and so preserved my dignity and self-respect.

Harold was no less punctilious, and when we started to walk back to the house, each was very careful not to fall a single step behind the other and be accused of "tagging." Indeed, our individual dignity required that we should both walk in a footpath only wide enough for one, with our shoulders ground together, an attitude of uncompromising independence that was very soothing to our feelings, if attended with some inconveniences; for when we reached the door we found it impossible to enter abreast, and as neither would give way an acute situation was again imminent, until the idea of entering by the window suggested itself to me as an expedient involving no abatement of my rights of dignity.

It was now plain to me that I must execute my intention without delay, if I would not be anticipated by Harold. For I had fully determined that I could remain no longer under Mr. Walpole's roof. I meant to leave it and seek my parents at the end of that long, blue, zigzag pencil mark I had seen on the map that hung upon the wall in the parlor back of the shop. Of the reason which impelled me

to that determination, I can now say little either in defense or explanation. They were the reasons of an impulsive boy confronted, with tragic suddenness, by a question whose solution seemed to involve what was better or worse in him of gratitude, honor, self-respect. Had I been brought there to filch away from Harold the fortune he had been reared to look forward to as his own? Was it my part, after the kindnesses that had been heaped upon me, to aid in the further degradation of my broken and ruined benefactor? Could I, even by my presence there, as the one person indispensable to the attorney's purpose, seem to further that purpose? The one course that would free me from these suspicions, and show everyone that I was not waiting there a ready tool to the attorney's hand, was to take myself off, and disappear from the scene of these troubles, as well as from the knowledge of everyone connected with them. If ever misgivings assailed me that this determination sprang from the same moral cowardice that had prompted my abortive attempt to run away from Doctor Pusey's, it was not then; nor, I can as truthfully say, did there appear to me to be anything heroic or self-denying in it. In some way, through circumstances which I had had no share in shaping, I had brought calamity upon those heads from which I could have most wished to ward suffering, and, though guiltless in intention, my presence there after the blow deepened the injury, and I would simply do the one thing in my power to right the wrong—go away, and forever refuse to profit by it.

Having settled this course in my mind, I lost no time and made my preparations to leave that very night. Ever since Mr. Walpole's seizure Harold and I had relieved each other at his bedside during the night. I had remained in the sick chamber until midnight, while Harold took his rest, after which he took my place till morning. My plan was to stand my watch that night as usual, and then when Harold relieved me, to pretend to go to bed, but



to slip from the house instead and use the hours before day in making good my flight. One other consideration hastened my determination. Starbright had been sent for and was expected the next morning. In my miserable, self-accusing state I had no wish to see her, much less her misery when she learned the reason of her summons; and so, with this last torture in my heart—for the thought of her coming there when I should be gone, and judging me perhaps, was still another penance I voluntarily took upon my overweighted shoulders,—the day wore away and the night of my immolation came on.

Meanwhile, I had, late in the afternoon, made a small bundle of extra clothing (with which I also wrapped up a dozen biscuits got from the kitchen) and secretly conveyed it into the garden, where I hid it under the very bush from which Harold and I had seen Mrs. Walpole make her midnight trips to the summer-house. But my chief thought was bestowed upon the question of funds for my enterprise, and these I realized would be very slim. Harold and I had, for some time past, made a pool of our money and kept it in a secret cache in a hollow tree in the park against the winter's demand for cream cakes at school, and this hoard contained all our individual and combined wealth.

I visited it at dusk and counted it over; there were eight dollars and twelve cents. Half of this I took and left a note in receipt thereof, in full discharge of my claim against the bank. The only advantage I took of Harold was to reject a plugged quarter. This precious fund I sewed into the lining of my jacket that night while Mr. Walpole dozed, all but some loose silver which I kept in my pocket for my immediate wants.

As the hours wore on and I sat in my chair, with the light turned low, while the sick man tossed restlessly on his pillow, I reviewed in my mind the strange happenings which had brought it to pass that I, who but a short while ago was playing on the steps of the bookshop, should sit there,

breathlessly waiting for the stroke of midnight to fly from a fortune to which I was the rightful heir, with all my worldly wealth upon my back and two thousand weary miles before my feet. That I did not shrink from these thoughts, but opened my mind to them boldly, justified my own confidence in the strength of my purpose, and, though my heart beat quickly, I listened for Harold's step at the door with a calm face and steady nerves.

The muffled boom of the great clock downstairs had not ceased to reverberate through the silent house, when the door opened softly and he came in.

"How has he rested?" he asked, going to the bedside and bending over the pillow.

"Fairly well," I replied; "you are not to give him the fever draught unless he wakes, and if he stays awake, every hour as usual. Good-night."

Harold stepped between me and the door as I started to leave the room, and threw his arm around me. The old whimsical smile was on his face.

"We won't quarrel, will we, Sum?" he whispered.

I shook my head and smiled back into his face. Our hands stole together, and we stood there in the darkened room in an embrace that was to him the passing of a shadow that had come between us, and to me a last farewell.

"I am sorry this thing has happened," he whispered, "sorry for us both, for do you know, old man, I had just made up my mind about you." The smile was still upon his lips, but his eyes were serious, the same curious expression I had noticed the first time I saw him and so many, many times since.

"About me?"

He nodded. "We ruled out the doctor business, you know. Country practice is no good; half a dozen miles for an old woman with the stomach ache; knock you up any old hour. Name all the babies after you, silver mug apiece,

cost just the price of your fee. Law just as bad; a dozen years or so sticking wafers on papers and practicing a round, full hand in an office where you're just a clerk; never get anywhere."

The same old Harold! Planning for me to the last. I held him close to me and watched his face.

"I had just made up my mind, old man, to make you a journalist! The very thing, eh? You'd be a great editor and write smashing articles and rip things up generally. Did you ever stop to think of the power of the press?"

There was a wistful look in his eyes and I could not trust myself to speak. I smiled at him and shook my head.

"It's too bad," he said, with a sigh. "I'd set my heart upon it. Well, never say die, Sum! I may be able to see you through yet—who knows?"

And I echoed, "Who knows?"

"Good-night, old man!"

"Good-night, old chap!"


I saw him as I looked back from the door gently smoothing the pillow of the sick man, and, as I closed it softly after me and tiptoed down the passage, I felt that I was doing well and that it was his place where I had left him.

I did not go to our room at all. I had no heart for another leave-taking, even from that. I waited instead at the head of the stairs and counted the minutes. Five minutes, ten minutes, a quarter of an hour. No sound came from the sick room; the solemn ticking of the great clock in the lower hall alone broke the silence of the house.

Stealthily I descended the stairs, my hand sliding down the broad, polished banister, my feet seeking the thickly carpeted treads in the darkness, pausing and listening at every step. I gained the lower hall; the great clock ticked now at my side, so loudly that I feared it might drown any warning sound from above, and hurried past it into the back passage leading to the kitchen. Here all was still again. The moonlight lay on the polished floor and marked

a white path across the room. I avoided it, and keeping in the shadow reached the door; it was the work of a moment only to undo the fastenings, open it wide enough to allow the passage of my body, and step out into the moonlight. The door clicked behind me; I was free.

Hurrying across the grass to where I had concealed my bundle, I secured it, and keeping on through the trees gained the road at a point a considerable distance from the house. There I paused and looked back. The gables and tall chimneys of the house that had been my home for over three years stood out clearly against the sky over the tops of the swaying trees. Lower down a faint glow showed me where Harold kept his vigil. I looked at it long and earnestly, and as I turned away a boyish tear stood on my cheek, but there was nothing in my heart to tell me that I had not done well.



## CHAPTER XVI

### I FALL IN WITH A NEW ACQUAINTANCE

WHEN I got to Lynn and walked into the railroad station, I had a misgiving that the combination of boy, hour, and bundle might look suspicious to the sleepy ticket-seller, a suspicion that was strengthened when I asked for a ticket to Boston and he was so long about it behind his little window that I considered it a mere pretense and that he was in reality sending for the police. But when at last, getting anxious, I peered round at him again and found that he had forgotten all about me and was composing himself to take another nap, my relief was so great that I lost sight of the provocative nature of this proceeding, and went outside and walked up and down the platform under the flaring gas lamps until my fluttering fears should have composed themselves a little. After a time other late travelers began to arrive, and following these back to the window, where the ticket-seller had obligingly waked himself up, I got my ticket with the rest, the man merely asserting his independence by yawning dreadfully when he gave it to me and sweeping my money contemptuously into his box.

I did not treat myself to a ride to Boston on the train for the mere luxury of it, or because I had any notion of spending my scanty resources in that form of traveling; but I considered it good economy as well as good strategy to spend a little money to put as many miles between me and Swampscott, in the few hours before my flight should be discovered, as possible, and I proposed not only to ride to Boston, but to ride out of it a short distance, after which

it would be time enough to adopt a less expensive programme. In the station at Boston I found a great map in a frame upon the wall, and taking my place before this I studied it as my father and mother had studied the one with the blue pencil mark, in the parlor back of the shop. There was St. Louis, one, two, three, four, five spans of my hand! The distance was too great, I could not conceive it and would not think of it now. I would split it up and think of it as I should traverse it, a little at a time. I selected a point a fraction of the distance, and set my mind upon that as my objective point. It was straight away west from Boston, not quite one span of my hand—Albany; that should be the first stage of my journey.

The September sun had not yet glinted the tops of the station towers when, with my ticket in my hand, I found myself upon the train, rattling through the silent city toward the yellowing fields of the country, my long journey begun.

A short half-hour brought us to the place to which I had purchased my ticket, and if I had entertained any fluttering notion of pretending to be asleep, I abandoned it when the conductor looked at me sharply and called out the name of the station. It was a small, country place, and its lonely and deserted character suited very well indeed the plan I had formed. As soon as the train went on I walked quickly up the line to where I had seen a watering tank and here, out of sight of the station, I sat down and waited, making my breakfast the while on one of my biscuits. At last, after an hour or more perhaps, I heard the sharp whistle and heavy rumble of a train approaching from the city, and ran and concealed myself behind some empty cars at the side of the line. The coming train was, as I had hoped, a freight train, and I saw with delight that it was going to stop. With a loud clanking of brakes and shrill escapings of steam from the panting engine the long train rumbled slowly past where I lay hid and came to a stand-

still. Peering out I saw that the engine was taking water. This was my opportunity. Slipping from behind my cover, I ran down the long train, keeping close under the high embankment to escape observation, looking for a car I could climb into and lie concealed. Most of them were closed, and the heavy, sliding doors sealed with leaden seals, but some distance down the line I espied one with the lower half of the door boarded up, and this one I made for and clambered into. It was half filled with clean, yellow corn into which I sank nearly to my knees when I sprang over the low door: Elated with my good luck I crept to the further end of the car, and burrowed deep down into the sweet-smelling cargo, covering myself with it to the face, and lay there breathless. I could hear the fierce, regular breathing of the locomotive and the shouts of the train crew; once a brakeman came running over the roof and I buried my head under cover, but he passed on, and I could hear his retreating footsteps as he sprang from one car to another. Two sharp blasts from the whistle, a sudden tightening throughout the whole length of the train, a quick jerk and a rattle that passed down the line of cars with ever-increasing rapidity, like a ripple in the water, a tremendous exhaust of steam from the straining engine, and we started. Oh, the blessed relief of that motion! And how like music to my ears was the chug of the wheels, the creaking and complaining of the wooden car as it swayed on its trucks, the smell of the iron as the smoking flanges ground against the curves, and the hoarse rumble and roar of all that laden train that told me we were moving, faster and ever faster on my way!

Hour after hour passed. I got hungry and munched some of the hard yellow corn; it tasted good, and I foresaw that I should eke out my biscuits nicely, only it made me thirsty. My bed in the corn was luxurious, my bundle made a comfortable pillow and, worn out with the excitement of the day and night, I stretched my limbs deliciously and slept.

A cessation of the noise and motion wakened me, and I

sat bolt upright and rubbed my eyes. It was pitch-dark and I was shivering cold. I had slept the day out! I crawled to the door and looked out. The train was at a standstill and everywhere, on both sides, were endless lines of freight cars. In the distance I could hear the puffing of engines and the rattle and crash of heavy cars. Here and there on the tops of cars and on the ground I caught the flash of lanterns. What the hour was, or what place I was in, I could not guess.

I felt refreshed by my long sleep but I was feverishly thirsty, and I determined to get out and get a drink of water somewhere and find out where I was. But first I filled my pockets full of corn, and thus provisioned and with my jacket buttoned tight and my collar turned up, for the air was surprisingly chill, I swung myself down from my hiding-place and started off up the track.

I had not proceeded far when I met a brakeman coming toward me, signaling with his lantern, and him I accosted.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed, flashing his lantern in my face, "What's this, live stock?"

"If you please, sir, what place is this?"

The man surveyed me deliberately in the light of his lantern, bundle, bulging pockets, and turned-up collar, and gave a grunt.

"On the hog, eh? Where you bound?"

I told him I wanted to get to Albany.

"Well, *this* is Albany," he replied; "what's your graft now you're here?"

I was considerably astonished but well enough pleased and, not in the least understanding what he meant by his inquiry, ventured to ask him what time it was.

"If thirty-four warn't two hours late as usual," he growled, moving off with his lantern, "it 'ud be just midnight, and I'd be in bed." From which I argued that it was now two o'clock in the morning.

I waited about the freight yards till daylight, when, by



guarded inquiries and by watching the bulletin board where outgoing freights were posted, I learned where the Buffalo trains were made up, and attempted to board three during the forenoon, but was discovered each time and ordered off. By noon time I was thoroughly discouraged, and after eating two of my biscuits sitting on an empty flat car, and turning the situation over in my mind, I did what I heartily wished I had done early in the morning—slung my bundle over my shoulder and walked out of town.

I walked all the rest of that day and passed through one good-sized town, but I did not stop. I had a dread of all towns where I might be stopped and questioned,—perhaps taken in by the police for vagrancy. I preferred to take my chances in the open country, and kept moving; when night finally overtook me I struck off from the railroad into a field, and passed the night under a haystack, where I slept till the sun was high. Although somewhat sore and stiff in the morning I set out again and soon walked myself into condition, being as fit as anything by noon, when I came to a small place and bought half a pound of cheese to go with my biscuits, which I had latterly begun to find not quite satisfying under my unusual exertions. I rested here for an hour (keeping my eye open for constables), and then pushed on. In this way I walked steadily for four days, sleeping in the fields, and buying food in the places I passed through, eked out by apples, which I occasionally found near the railroad, but as a rule I did not stray far from this highway, on which I was never without hope of catching another lucky lift.

On the fourth day I came to Utica, woefully footsore and weary beyond description, but in good spirits. Here I was fortunate enough to climb unperceived upon a train of coal cars and rode that night to Syracuse, not at all improved in appearance. At this place it set in to rain, and I spent the remainder of the night in the public waiting-room of the depot, thinking it necessary, I am sorry to say, in support of

my assumed character of *bona fide* traveller, to make frequent inquiries at the ticket window as to what time I might expect the arrival of my uncle, who was coming from Chicago, to meet me there and accompany me to New York. In the morning I treated myself to a cup of hot coffee and sallied forth to try for another train, for I now realized that I must depend upon them; my feet were in such condition that I could scarcely bear the weight of my body upon them. About the middle of the forenoon a train of flat cars, loaded with lumber, pulled out of the yard where I had been hanging about, and this looking promising I ran alongside of it as fast as my swollen feet would permit, and with some difficulty, encumbered as I was with my bundle, succeeded in swinging myself up to the iron step and crawling aboard. And now I considered myself good for a long lift on my way, but the train had not proceeded many minutes, when a shadow fell across me, and looking quickly up I saw one of the train crew standing upon the next car, looking down at me. My heart leaped into my throat and I sat and gazed at him with the fascination of fear. He was a big, red-faced man, with a blue handkerchief knotted round his thick neck, and a blue cloth cap pulled over his eyes.

"Come out of that!" he shouted to me, gesticulating violently with his hand. "Come up here, do you hear, you d—— skunk!"

I got to my feet as best I could, for the swaying of the heavy train made it almost impossible to stand without holding on to some support, and attempted to step across the open space between the cars. As I did so the man reached suddenly down, and seizing me by the collar dragged me brutally up to where he stood upon the pile of lumber, bruising my face and tearing my clothing upon the rough projecting ends of the timbers.

"You d—— yegg, what do you mean, jumping this train under my very eyes!" he yelled, his voice rising above the

roar of the train. "I'll learn you no son of a *thief* can jump number six out of Syracuse!" Still holding me by the collar with one hand, he struck me in the face with the other; struck me a blow that knocked me fairly out of his grasp, so that I fell, blinded with blood, to the boards under our feet and rolled to the side of the car, grasping and clutching at the timbers to save myself from going over the edge. Even as I pulled myself to my knees, holding on to the upright timber that secured the load in place, he rushed at me and aimed a kick at my head which, if it had landed, must have sent my lifeless body to be mangled under the wheels; but I threw myself flat and he missed me, while his own momentum and a sudden lurch of the car all but delivered him to the death he had tried to send me to. Before he could recover himself to renew the attack I had sprung away to the other end of the car, and begun to climb down from the load to the platform of the car itself. With a volley of curses he sprang after me, and I think I breathed a prayer, for I knew I had only one chance to escape him, and that was to leap from the train, which might well mean death. And now a slight circumstance again intervened to save me from his murderous fury. I had disposed my bundle in such a way as would, I believed, prevent it from again impeding me as it had when I boarded the train. I had knotted the four ends of the outer covering and tied it round my arm above the elbow, which, of course, left my hands free. The bundle, forming a pretty solid padding, was still in position on my right arm when I swung myself down off the pile of lumber with the infuriated brakeman in pursuit. I was still grasping one of the projecting timbers with my right hand while my feet sought for the platform below, when he rushed upon me, and wrenching loose a piece of scantling from the load, swung it over his head and brought it down with full force of his strength upon my outstretched arm. Only the protecting bundle of clothing prevented it from snapping the bone, but striking this, the blow glanced,

and though it broke my hold and sent me reeling from the platform, nearly precipitating me between the cars, it spent its force upon the pile of timbers, shivering in pieces which fell to the rails; and I heard, with a giddy sickness, the crunching of the wheels as they ground them to bits.

For a second I closed my eyes while my head went round and my ears sang, but my resolution was taken. Already the brakeman was climbing down, still grasping the shivered end of the scantling, and I had no time to lose.

I sprang to the iron ladder and let myself down till my feet rested upon the lower step, grasping the upper rail with my hands. The train was running along a high embankment whose sloping sides were covered with coarse gravel and rocks, and at the bottom pools of muddy water stood in the fringe of thicket that lined the way. The cruel, stony bank raced madly under my eyes, and I could hear the hail of gravel against the grinding wheels as the fierce suction of the train drew it along. I looked ahead; there was nothing but the scarred and precipitate bank as far as I could see. Doubling my body I leaned far out, prepared to jump. But even as I picked out a spot with my eye, my pursuer was upon me and seized his chance.

As I clung with my hands to the top round of the ladder, and he saw that I was going to make the leap, he raised his heavy boot and dashed his heel down upon my straining fingers, laying bare the bone.

With a cry I let slip my hold and made a futile grasp at the next lower round, missed it, and fell straight backward into the air. As I felt myself going I gave a vigorous kick with my foot to send myself clear, and twisting my body in the air fell feet foremost, with my face toward the engine. As my heels struck the ground my back seemed to snap, my head and shoulders shot forward, plowing my outstretched hands into the loose gravel, and I plunged heels over head down the steep embankment, crashing through briars and the flinty rock ballast that

cut my flesh like knives; through the reedy ooze at the foot of the declivity; through the tangled vines and bushes that screened a young grove of saplings in the field; and plump into something soft, yielding, and human on the other side, that sprang up with a startled cry and threw its arms around me, and rolled over and over with me upon the ground. My heels rattled into something like tinware, and a shower of hot, greasy liquid descended upon my head and face, and even to my half-conscious senses I thought it smelled good, and at the same instant my shoulders scattered the glowing embers of a fire that singed my neck and hair, and lent additional fervor to the yell I gave when I brought up with a crash against a tree and sat up, looking into the face of a young man whom I held in my arms, and who in turn maintained a close grip with both his hands upon my collar.

We sat thus for some seconds, looking at each other. I don't know what I looked like, except that I was bloody and torn, and covered with mud, and that hot soup was dripping out of my hair, but as for the young man he was a sandy-haired young man, with small, blinking, gray eyes, a sharp ferret-like face, smooth as a peeled egg and florid in color, and the flabby drawn-in lips that denoted the absence of some of his front teeth.

"Get off the train?" he inquired, with a jerk of his head toward the track.

"Yes, sir," I replied.

He removed one hand from my collar and felt of his nose tenderly, wiped some dirt from his lips, and replaced his arm around my neck. I still held him by the loose folds of his shirt, too dazed yet to fully realize where I was or what I was doing.

"In future, when you wish to get off a train on this line," he said, kindly, "you want to give a loud toot to let the engineer know, and he will stop for you. Like enough he didn't know you had decided not to go any further.

Smelt my soup, and thought you'd stop off, eh? If you had sent me word you were coming instead of dropping in this way, unexpected-like, I would have made more, so we could both have had some. Hope you found it to your liking?"

I squeezed the steaming mess out of my hair, and, wiping my face on the sleeve of my jacket, said I was sorry I had spilled his dinner, and hoped I had not hurt him.

He disentangled himself from my embrace and stood up, shaking his legs and adjusting his disarranged clothing.

"No bones broken," he announced. "Let's have a look at that hand." His sharp eyes had detected my maimed fingers, and he took them in his own and gave a low whistle as he examined them.

"Stone-crusher?" he asked, briefly.

I detailed to him my encounter with the brakeman, and he listened while he cleaned the dirt from my hand, leaving me once to wet his handkerchief in a small stream that flowed through the field, and dressed it neatly; binding it up finally with the handkerchief and with some tobacco, which he took from his pocket, pressed against the wounds. It smarted a good deal, but he said it was the best thing going.

When he had finished he turned his attention to my other wounds.

"Let's see that face," he commanded; "is that your blood or the railroad company's?" He wiped it away, and his comment was brief and favorable. "Huh! Nose split, lip cut, eye damaged, nothing serious; what else you got?"

I told him I guessed that was all, but he made me roll up my trousers and discovered two badly skinned knees, which he said would be all right when we got the gravel out, and a rather deep cut on my thigh which he said would have been bad if it had been on my head.

"What's this?" he asked, untying my bundle from my arm,

preparatory to stripping off my jacket. I told him it was my extra clothing.

"Clothes, eh?" he said, tossing it on the ground. "Is there any place in your town where mothers leave their children to be taken care of, so they won't put beans up their noses, while they go out to buy the sausage for father's supper?"

"No," I replied, wondering.

"I thought not. If there was, you'd be there, wouldn't you? Now the other arm, that's right. When you get to be a big boy, I'll show you how to carry your extra clothes when you travel. Your elbow will be black and blue tomorrow. Anything on the other arm? No, sound as a dollar. You'll travel some more, I guess."

He had conducted his examination in the briskest manner, handling me with a deftness as surprising as his interest was welcome. I conceived at once a very favorable notion of this young man with the thin, intelligent face and blinking eyes, and considered myself lucky in falling into his hands.

"Now then," he said with the same briskness, when I had resumed my jacket, "we'll have some dinner, unless you've stove a hole in the kettle." He picked it up and examined it with the same critical care that he had bestowed upon my body a moment before.

"All right," he announced, cheerfully; "nothing but a dent. Do you remember where you left the fire? Oh, there it is, we'll have things going in a minute, like six o'clock."

He gathered the scattered embers together again, and, piling on new fagots, soon had a crackling blaze under the kettle.

"Now then," he continued, kicking with his foot among the tufts of grass, "you didn't happen to notice where the bone went to, did you?"

"The bone?" I repeated, looking about me on the ground.

"The soup-bone. You would know it in a minute, it's shaped just like a boxing glove. Ah! here we are."

He picked it up and examined it anxiously. "All right," he said, as before; "meat's still on it. Now you just make yourself to home while I fetch the water. If you've got a jack-knife you better hold it to that eye while I'm gone."

He was back in a minute with water from the stream in his battered tin kettle, and popping the joint into it, propped it over the fire on flat stones he had provided, and stood over it, anxiously waiting for it to come to a boil.

"It probably won't be as good as the first," he said, stirring it doubtfully. "You wouldn't expect it from a second-hand bone."

When it began to boil he threw in pinches of some kind of seasoning he took from his pocket (I think it was the same pocket he produced the tobacco from), and held his nose over the steam from the pot.

"She's coming," he announced.

He stirred away as before and fell to whistling a lively tune, from which I inferred that the bone was exceeding his expectations, at which I was not ill pleased myself.

"What's your name?" he asked, suddenly breaking off.

"Sumner Bibbus."

"What?" He turned and looked at me over his shoulder, holding the stick he had been stirring with in his hand.

"Sumner Bibbus."

"Oh, all right," he said, turning cheerfully to his work again; "you don't have to tell if you don't want to."

Seeing that he didn't believe me, I made no attempt to convince him, and the soup being pronounced fit in a few minutes, he whisked it off the fire, and producing a tin cup from the grass, filled it brimming and presented it to me.

"Here you go!" he cried. "You first—what did you say your name was?" he asked, grinning. I think he was



rather pleased with what he thought was my ability in the impromptu choice of a name, and waited to hear it again.

"Sumner Bibbus," I repeated, smiling and taking the cup from his hand.

"Good!" he cried, slapping his leg. "That's the best yet!" He filled a cup of soup for himself, and raising it in the air as if he were drinking a bumper to my masterly finesse, sipped it off and smacked his lips. "But you won't care," he continued, leaning toward me, with the grin still on his face, "if I call you Jim, just like that *was* your name?"

"Certainly not," I replied; "anything you say. You have been very kind to me indeed, and if you don't mind I'll take a little more of that soup; it's just right." It did indeed taste good, being piping hot and with plenty of pepper in it.

He filled both our cups again, and I remembered that I had part of a loaf of bread in my bundle, which was produced, and we made a most excellent meal. At its conclusion my companion sat himself down with his back against a tree opposite my tree, and with a sigh of satisfaction rolled himself a cigarette.

"You don't smoke, do you, Jim?" he asked, wetting the end in his mouth.

I shook my head.

"Well, I do," he said, striking a match. "I find it's a good substitute for eating when there's nothing doing in that line." He leaned his head back and discharged a cloud of smoke through his nose and mouth.

"Now, Jim," he said, throwing one leg over the other and hitching his body down until he got into a position that suited him, half lying and half sitting against the tree, "let's take a look at your case. You appear to have made a mess of this trip, and perhaps I can give you some pointers. In the first place, where you going?"

"St. Louis," I replied.

He shook his head. "No good," he said; "ninety days, herd you with niggers, feed you on pork and molasses, and work you on the levee. Keep away from St. Looney."

I explained that I was not going to stop there; that I was going down into the Ozarks to seek my parents.

"Not into Arkansas?" he asked, in alarm. "They sell you at auction down there and work you in the convict camps. Same thing as a lifer; sentence you till you can escape. Pay you twenty-five cents a day and charge you fifty for board and let you work out the balance. Dock you for rainy days and charge you for quinine. Keep away from Arkansas."

I told him I should not go there; that I expected to find my parents in the lead mines.

"Better go with me to Chi," he urged.

Without inquiring where that was I shook my head and thanked him, and to his further questionings related the whole of my trip from Boston.

"Walked from Albany to Utica!" he exclaimed, sitting bolt upright, and removing the cigarette from his lips. "And held down freights! Well, you are a ninny. Why didn't you hit the blind?"

"The blind? What is that?" I asked, mystified.

He lay flat down upon his back and gave a groan. "Oh, Lord!" he said. "Here's a kid don't know what a blind is! And him going to St. Looney!" He lay for some time turning this state of affairs over in his mind, evidently finding it pretty stiff for his comprehension. At last he pulled himself up.

"Jim," he said, "James, let me take your handkerchief." I took it from my pocket and handed it to him. "Now can I trouble you for your hat?" I passed him that also, and he took it with a bow. "Now if you will kindly give me your attention, gentlemen—I mean James—I will show you a little trick of mine which I had the honor of exhibiting before the Prince of Wales upon the occasion of my

presentation at the Court of St. James, which interested him greatly. The Prince did me the honor to lay a trifling wager with me upon the result, but that is neither here nor there. I perform this little trick merely for your amusement, but if any gentleman thinks, as the Prince thought, that he sees through it, I am willing to cover any amount that he will lay upon the board."

As he ran on he was deftly wadding my handkerchief up in a ball and tucking it ostentatiously in the lining of my hat. Then he took his own hat and placed it upon the ground between his knees, and briskly twirling mine in the air, let it fall beside it.

"Now, gentlemen, you perceive the two hats together upon the bar—I would say the ground—with the handkerchief in the gentleman's here." He raised mine and exposed the handkerchief, passing the hat through the air in his hand on all sides of him as if he were exhibiting it to a ring of spectators, and replaced it carefully beside his own.

"Now then," he continued, rolling up his sleeves, and passing his palms slowly over the hats, "observe closely, and keep in mind which shell—I mean hat—the handkerchief is under." Taking hold of the crown of each hat with his thumb and finger he raised them slowly from the ground, shook each of them, and dropped them back in place.

"Now will any gentleman indicate the hat the handkerchief is under?"

He looked at me and nodded, and I raised my hat and looked into it. The handkerchief was not there! He grinned appreciatively at the look of astonishment on my face and lay back against the tree with his hands clasped back of his head.

"Poor eye, Jim, poor eye," he said, laughing. "Gravel not all out yet, likely. Look in my hat."

I did so, and there was the handkerchief tucked away in the lining!

"Put it in your pocket, Jim, put it in your pocket," he

said, kindly; "then you will know where it is when you want to blow your nose."

Replacing his hat on his head, very much on one side, and rolling himself another cigarette, he laid himself down again upon his back.

"After we've snoozed the sun down," he announced,—  
"and she's throwing a shadow now,—we'll pull out of here and I'll show you, son, how to hold the blind down to Buffalo. In the meantime I'd advise you to follow my example." And with his hat over his eyes he went instantly to sleep.

Considering that this masterful young man, who could make a soup out of nothing and cause a handkerchief to disappear from a hat without touching it, must be a pretty good judge of what was good for me under the circumstances, I accepted his suggestion and, curling up under the tree, soon joined him in the land of forgetfulness.

## CHAPTER XVII

I GO TO A FAIR WITH MY NEW ACQUAINTANCE AND LOSE HIM  
IN A HUE AND CRY

I WAS awakened by the hissing and sputtering of the fire, and springing up found my companion throwing water on it from the kettle. The sun had gone down and the dusk was already enveloping the low-lying fields.

"There you are," said my strange acquaintance, nodding to me as he crushed out the smoldering brands with his foot, "on deck! Feel pretty good?"

I told him I was much refreshed and ready for anything he had to propose.

"That's the way to talk!" he cried, tossing the empty kettle into the bushes. "Now then, what duds have you here?" He made a dive at my bundle of clothes and shook them out in a businesslike manner. "Whew! But we're an aristocrat! Double-breasted coat like an admiral, striped pants, pearl-buttoned shirt. We must be a favorite on mother's side of the house. Well, on with 'em. Get lively now, we got to pull our freight out of here."

I looked at him doubtfully. "Wear them, do you mean?" I asked. I had brought them along to appear in when I arrived at my destination, and it seemed a pity to get them soiled.

"Wear 'em? Sure, you didn't bring 'em to give the brakie, did you? Get into 'em. Here you go, shirt first, over the other, *over* the other, my jockey; you'll need 'em both before morning."

He pulled the shirt over my head and I struggled into it, while he brought the coat and stuffed me into that.

Lastly, I pulled the trousers on over my others, and my mentor eyed the result with satisfaction.

"There!" he cried, walking round me and smoothing out the places where I bulged. "That's the way to carry your clothes when you travel on the head end. Now come on, we've got some hoofing to do."

We left the camp and climbed up the steep embankment to the tracks and set off briskly in the direction of the town. My thigh hurt me a good deal, but I tried not to limp and kept up with my guide as best I could. Being rather a long-legged young man with only one pair of trousers on, he took two of the cross ties to my one.

"Do you see that light?" he asked, when we had walked a good half-hour and I was beginning to perspire pretty freely under my exertions. "That's a switch-tower, where another road crosses. We lay for the express there, she's due in half an hour and it'll be dark by then. Now keep close to me and mind your eye."

"Does the train stop here?" I inquired.

"No," answered my companion, "we'll have to jump her; but she slows down, of course. Now listen. When the headlight shows up we'll run up the track as far as that last switch. I'll wait there and take her last, she'll be hitting it pretty lively there, and you take her farther down, opposite that pole—see it, just beyond the tool-house? That'll give me a chance to see you make it all right. Take the head end, right back of the engine. Don't run along with her, whatever you do; you must make it before she gets up to me. Throw your foot up at the same time you reach for the rail. Don't grab the rail with your foot on the ground, or she'll jerk you to kingdom come."

"Is that the blind—back of the engine?" I asked.

He grunted an affirmative. He was peering up the line attentively and buttoning his coat tightly about him, pulling his hat down over his eyes and making himself trim for the coming enterprise.

"Haven't you ever noticed," he asked, "that the ends of mail, baggage, and express cars haven't any doors? Well, that's the blind; once you get on the platform between two of those cars, or back of the engine, they can't get at you, and you're good for the next stop anyway. All you got to do is hit an express, and you're good for all night."

By this time we had gained the shelter of the tool-house and lay there, while the darkness thickened around us and the lights of the town came out in an ever-widening circle, twinkling warmly in the distance.

"What do you think of the handkerchief trick, Jim?" my companion asked, suddenly, when we had sat in silence against the wall for some moments.

I told him I thought it was very clever indeed.

He didn't say anything for a minute and then leaned forward and spat out into the darkness. "Should you like to learn it, eh?"

I told him certainly, I should like very much to know how it was done and be able to do it.

"Then you shall, Jim!" he said, heartily. "I'll learn you, son. I never showed anyone else, but I'll put you on, Jim; blamed if I don't. You're white clean through, and just my style. I'll put you on to that little trick, Jim, just like falling off a log."

Emboldened by his friendliness I ventured to ask him, in a whisper, what name I might call him by.

I could feel him shake in the darkness with silent laughter. Truly, thought I, this was a most extraordinary young man.

He was silent for a moment or two and I could see that he was thoughtfully rubbing his hands up and down his legs.

"Let's see," he said, finally, "what did you say your name was again?"

"Sumner Bibbus."

"Ah! That was it. Bibbus, yes, sure! Well, there's one

thing, Jim, you ain't likely to go to sleep and forget it, not that name, no! Once you get it pat, *there's* a name as'll stay with you! I'll tell you what it is, Jim, you can call me The Wonder if you like, just like that was *my* name, and there's some folks says it is, or ought to be."

He was evidently greatly pleased with his ingenuity and considered that he had repaid me in my own coin. I could hear him chuckling to himself, and once or twice he poked me with his elbow as if to remind me that the tables were now turned.

"Never mind, Jim," he said, finally, slapping me on the back, "you're white clean through and just my style. I'll look out for you, son. I'm going your way as far as Cleveland and *you* don't need to worry. You won't walk and you won't hold down freights while you're with me."

I thanked him warmly, and indeed I meant it, but at that instant he sprang to his feet, and even my inexperienced ear caught the faint pounding on the rails that announced the coming of the train, and the next moment its long shrill whistle split the night and its fiery headlight shot around the curve into the white path of light thrown from the tower.

"Quick!" cried The Wonder, seizing my arm and dragging me after him. "She ain't waiting for old ladies with bird-cages to-night."

We ran as fast as we could along the embankment to the spot he had appointed for me, and with a last word of caution he left me there and dashed on to his own post. I drew a long breath and waited. The ground shook and the rails sang as she came on, and when she took the frogs where the other tracks intersected, there was a sound like the sputter of musketry, and before it had ceased the huge black bulk of the engine was upon me. I sprang out from the shadow and met it. Fierce jets of steam whipped my legs and plowed furrows in the loose gravel of the road-bed as the ponderous wheels thundered by me, but I



stood my ground and sprang for the platform. As my feet touched the step and the iron rail met my outstretched hand, I was lifted, with no effort of my own, from the ground and flung face downward upon the steps, my breast striking the top one pretty sharply, and there I lay still under a shower of cinders, scarcely daring to breathe. The next instant another figure seemed to be sucked out of the darkness and fell upon me, and The Wonder's voice said in my ear: "Well done, kid!"

Together we crawled up and sat with our backs against the end of the car, and, with our arms interlocked and heads bowed against the rushing wind that seemed to hold us flattened there, we plunged onward into the night.

Ahead the leaping engine seemed to be a living thing, rushing shrieking from some pursuing demon. Its great black form swayed and plunged before us as if it were seeking, in its giant strength, to tear itself from the grasp of the train behind and pursue alone its own wild way. With ever increasing speed and thunderous roar it tore its way through the blackness, now emitting its ear-piercing shriek, and now shooting a broad fiery glare into the sky as it opened its devouring mouth to receive the food that fed its strength and fury. We made no effort to talk—no human voice could have been heard above the noise of the rushing train and the rushing night—and sat silently counting the minutes and the miles as they flew. Lights flashed past us, stations, lines of standing cars that threw a new metallic note into our dull roar; overhead bridges, deep, rock-lined cuts, and hollow-sounding trestles, and still we flew, while the minutes lengthened into hours.

At last the green switch lights began to wink by and the endless clickety-click of the frogs to sound under the wheels again. Shadowy lines of freight cars came into view, standing on side-tracks, and noisy little engines with clanging bells rattled by, pushing loaded cars. Our speed began to diminish, we could hear the hiss of the air as the

brakes were applied, and the wind ceased to beat our hats over our faces and hold them there, and we could open our mouths without having the breath blown out of our bodies.

"We're coming into Buffalo, Jim," shouted The Wonder, in my ear, scrambling up. "We'll have to fall off before she pulls into the station and run ahead and lay for her as she pulls out."

"Does this train go any further?" I asked, bewildered at this rate of traveling.

"Does she? She goes to Chicago, son, and if we have luck we'll hold her down to Cleveland, anyway. Get down on that step and jump when I give the word."

I followed his directions and hung by the rail while the train ran through the long freight yard, and just as it emerged The Wonder gave the word and I dropped off and he quickly followed me.

"This way," he said, starting off in a direction at right angles to that of the train we had left, "we won't trouble to go into the station; *our* baggage don't need looking after, I reckon."

We ran across the tracks to a wide platform piled high with milk cans to which we climbed, and continuing down this to a flight of steps descended to an open space where long rows of wagons were discharging trunks and baggage. Dodging among these, The Wonder led the way into a brilliantly lighted street, where a throng of people were hurrying from the station into cabs and carriages that lined the sidewalk, but he allowed me scant time for observation, for almost immediately we plunged into a dark labyrinth of narrow alleys from which we emerged, after some seconds of hard running, upon the open tracks, and The Wonder threw one glance behind him and slowed up.

"We're in time," he panted, "she's still there, but we'll have to go further up, for she's flagged past these crossings. Hunch along, kid."

It was marvellous the way he threaded his way among the network of tracks, guided by the colored switch-lamps. Looking back, there were perhaps half a dozen headlights visible, on which of the interlacing rails it would have been folly for me to guess, but my guide never faltered once nor lost sight of our particular beacon.

"There she comes!" he cried. "Don't stumble over any of these switch bars or *you'll* never see St. Looney. I'll take the other side."

We caught her at the same instant from opposite sides, and The Wonder hurried me to the steps on his side and showed me how to lean out and flatten myself against the car, so as not to be seen as we were flagged past crossings. Three times we successfully accomplished this stragem before the train got into the open and resumed its old speed, when we took up our places as before and The Wonder assured me we were good to reach Cleveland in the small hours of the morning.

He had proved himself too good a prophet for me to doubt it, and so we sat, holding on to each other, with our feet braced against the brake-rods (and I think my companion even slept some), while the hours sped and I watched the constellations on their slow march through the heavens above.

We reached Cleveland without mishap, no stops having been made anywhere, and left the train in the outskirts of the town where it slowed down in the yard limits. Here, under shelter of the embankment, we built a fire, for the night was cold and we had suffered some from its effects during the long ride, and stretching ourselves on boards torn from a nearby fence, slept till morning, my companion showing me how to get the full benefit of the warmth of my coat by taking it off and throwing it over my head and shoulders.

We awoke much refreshed and The Wonder, bidding me replenish the fire, went into the town, and returned in a

short time with materials for a hearty breakfast, and prepared the meal with his own hands. Afterwards, the sun coming out bright and warming us through, he rolled himself a cigarette and reclined against a tree with his legs spread out before him.

"Now, Jim," he said, briskly, "what say we take our first lesson in the handkerchief trick, eh?"

I assented, and sat up in front of him with my legs spread apart like his, forming a convenient open space between us, while he took the hats and the handkerchief and began. Slowly and painstakingly he went through it again and again, explaining it as he went along, and then patiently guided my awkward hand while I made my first attempt. I failed lamentably, but he made me do it over and over again, and it seemed to me that every time I tried it I bungled it worse. But he never lost patience, never abated his cheerfulness, and every time I broke down, went back to the beginning and showed me all over again. We kept at it for an hour, and at the end of that time I was making exactly the same mistakes as at the start and threw down the hats in despair.

"Never mind, Jim," he said, cheerfully, laying them aside; "you can't expect to learn it in one lesson. Time, son, time; we won't try to overdo at the start. You done all right for a starter. Now put it off your mind till next time."

We lay around under the trees the rest of the forenoon, talking and dozing, and at noontime made a very good dinner off the remains of breakfast. After dinner I took another lesson and made some progress. The Wonder was delighted and complimented me highly.

"Jim," he said, heartily, "you're doing great! I'm proud of you, son. I never showed this trick to a living soul, not I, and between you and me it ain't everyone that could learn it. But you're smart, I seen that, and I says to myself, I'll learn him, and so I will, Jim. You stick to me, son, and I'll stick to you."

I was very much gratified with this praise and redoubled my efforts. Although The Wonder was not so very much older than myself—he couldn't have been much past twenty,—he was quite a sage in my eyes, and the knowledge and experience he had shown in the conduct of our joint affairs, coupled with his easy manner and skill at sleight-of-hand, marked him out to me as a person to be emulated.

"Jim," he said, when the lesson was over, "I seen posters in town this morning of a county fair going on back in the country a piece. What say we take a walk over?"

I agreed, but seized the occasion to question him about my further route to St. Louis, recalling what he had said about proceeding elsewhere from this point.

"Right you are, Jim," said he. "You strike for Indianapolis from here over the Big Four. But I tell you what, kid," he continued, thoughtfully chewing at a blade of grass. "I been thinking maybe I'd go on to St. Louey with you. You ain't noways fitten to travel alone as *I* can see."

This was what I had been secretly hoping for and I was overjoyed, and thanked him warmly.

"Oh, hell!" he said, easily, spitting out the grass in his mouth and springing to his feet; "don't feed me that. I ain't particular where I go, *I* got relatives everywhere. Now let's go and see the prize pig and the cow that gives twelve quarts to a milking."

We walked into town, and The Wonder looked in all the store windows as we went along and presently stopped before one in which various articles of furniture were displayed.

"You wait here, Jim," he said, "while I go inside a minute."

He went into the store and returned shortly with a small deal table, with folding legs, under his arms. Noting my look of astonishment, he laughed.

"Cheap enough at half a dollar, eh?" he said. "When you

go to a fair you might as well go prepared to do a stroke of business, Jim."

We struck into a country road, and soon encountered numerous wagons and conveyances of various sorts bearing the country people to the scene of the fair, and merry, noisy crowds they were. There were flutterings of white dresses and pink ribbons as the long-bodied wagons, with boards ranged crosswise for seats, loaded down with the farmers' sons and daughters, bowled by us on the road, and there were speedy trials between the more fortunate young men who possessed buggies and had each his own young lady to cheer him on. Several times we had to take to the side of the road in a hurry to get out of the way of these breakneck horsemen.

"This is evidently no slouch of a fair, Jim," said my companion, plodding along in the dust. "I'm glad I brought this table."

"What are you going to do with it?" I asked, curiously.

"Well, Jim," he returned, "you see a fellow like me that's on'y got one gift has got to make the most of it. Now I reckon maybe these sports never seen that little trick of mine, and I'm going to show it to 'em." He stole a look at me and shifted the table to his other arm.

"Now, Jim," he continued, "I'll want your help to do this thing right. You're white clean through, you are, and just my style. Together we'll make these yokels open their eyes, I guess. But there's one thing, kid, we must pretend not to know each other, and as soon as we get pretty close there we'll separate; and don't you come up till you see I've got a crowd round me and the thing under way."

"What is it you want me to do?" I asked, mystified.

"First thing, take this." He put his hand in his pocket and handed me a five-dollar bill. I looked at him in astonishment.

"Didn't know I had money, eh?" he said, laughing. "Well,

I got a little, Jim; my capital, you know. You take that and shove it in your pocket, son. When you hear me giving 'em my little game of talk, you just edge up into the crowd, promiscuous-like, and watch me. If they hold off and don't seem inclined to place their money, you step up when you see me rub my eye like this, and lay down that five to pick the shell, see? I'll tip you off the right one by touching my ear, right or left, this way; whichever ear I touch you pick the shell on that side. That's all you got to do, Jim, but don't let on to know me; you and me are strangers, remember. Now you better vamoose here and go on ahead, and when this wagon back of us overtakes you, ask 'em for a lift. Hunch now, son; we mustn't be seen together."

He fell behind and loitered at the side of the road while I hurried on, wondering a good deal at my share in the enterprise of letting the country folk into the mysteries of The Wonder's magic. But the wagon coming up and the driver bidding me get up behind, I soon dismissed all thought of it from my mind in contemplation of the lively scene that opened upon us as we swung around a bend in the road. A mixed array of buildings and tents, gayly decorated with streamers and bunting, occupied a large enclosure upon the level plain. Throngs of people in holiday attire were crowding the entrance, while the blare of bands, the shouts and laughter of the sightseers, the cries of vendors, and the neighing and trampling of the long rows of horses tethered to hitching rails outside, denoted that things were in full swing. I descended from the wagon and mixed with the crowd at the gate, where I found it would take my last twenty-five-cent piece to gain me admittance. I gave it up with some misgivings that it was foolishly spent, and reflected that I should now have to draw upon my reserve in the lining of my jacket.

Inside, I gave myself up to sightseeing, and wandered about among the booths and pavilions, staring at the won-

ders exhibited. There were puppet figures on wires to be thrown at with hard rubber balls, three throws for a nickel, and prizes for every lucky shot. "One baby, one cigar!" was the refrain of the vociferous attendant as he stood out in front in his shirt-sleeves. There were colored rings to be pitched for walking-canes; there was a man to guess your weight within one pound or refund your money; and an educated pig to tell your fortune by almost human grunts, interpreted by a foreign-looking lady with a great many rings upon her fingers and dazzling teeth, only a little stained by tobacco. There was an armless man to write your name upon a card with his toes, and a living mermaid disporting herself in a tank of water (at least, so the sign said, but it cost ten cents to see her do it, so I didn't look). Farther on an enterprising individual had a rattlesnake in a box with a glass top and offered to give anyone a dollar who would touch their lips to the glass without starting back when the snake struck, the experimenter to give up fifty cents if his nerves proved weak.

"Gentlemen, the Prince of Wales did me the honor to lay a trifling wager with me upon the result of this trick. I won't say who won, but if any gentleman thinks he can follow the pea with his eye, while I go through with it, I will cover any reasonable amount he will lay upon the board."

I started. It was The Wonder's voice, and glancing hastily around I saw him standing before his table surrounded by a goodly crowd of spectators. I sauntered up and looked on with the rest. He was performing with small, round shells and a pea, and showed even greater dexterity than he had with the hats.

"I have given this exhibition, gentlemen, all over the United States and Europe, and everywhere it has excited the wonder of all who saw it. See, I will do it very slowly; I place the pea there upon the table and raise the shells in my hands, so, dropping them in this manner, once, twice,



three times. That is all there is to it. Now will any gentleman indicate the shell the pea is under?"

There was laughter in the crowd, and pushing and horse play, and those in front were urged on by their companions to "go in and win" and "take the joker's money," but all hung back, though I could see hands steal into pockets and eager, doubting looks thrown at The Wonder and the innocent-looking shells upon the table.

The Wonder's eyes swept the crowd and rested for a second upon my face.

"Now's your chance, gentlemen, the pea is placed; who will pick it out?"

Slapping his hands together and briskly turning up his cuffs, his finger wandered to his eye for a second as he called out again encouragingly:

"Now's your chance, gentlemen, the pea is placed; who will pick it out?"

I stepped up and laid my five-dollar bill upon the table.

"I'll have a go," I said, boldly.

"Right!" cried The Wonder, whipping out another bill and laying it upon mine. "Here's a sport, gentlemen, will try his luck and a thorough-paced young blood it is."

A buzz ran through the crowd, and necks were craned from all directions to see the outcome of my venture. The Wonder was smiling away behind his table, with his thumbs in his armholes, and as I glanced up from studying the shells before me his hand went up for a moment to his right ear.

Without further hesitation I reached out and lifted up the shell on that side and exposed the pea.

There was a gasp from the crowd and The Wonder instantly picked up the money and handed it to me.

"Good eye!" he cried, heartily. "You win. Gentlemen, the young 'un was too many for me that time. Take your money, son, take your money. You seen that twist of my

wrist, didn't you, my hearty? But I never welch, gentlemen. I lost and the young 'un won. Who else'll have a try?"

He picked up the shells and went through the trick again and I saw conviction in a dozen faces. Two or three hands were instantly outstretched with money and The Wonder covered it all when every bettor eagerly agreed upon the same shell; but when it was raised the pea was not there. The Wonder swept the money into his pocket.

There was a murmur in the crowd, and those who had lost their money turned questioning faces upon each other. The Wonder instantly rattled on and prepared the shells again, but it seemed to me the crowd was not disposed to take this turn of fortune in good part, and I thought best to slip back a little way from the table and await developments at a distance. It was fortunate for me that I did so, for as I stood looking back, there was a sudden onrush of the crowd, and angry shouts were raised, and in an instant The Wonder's table was upset, and I saw him spring away with the incensed mob at his heels, some stopping long enough to smash the table into bits, and then joining the pursuit with yells and curses.

As I hesitated, frightened and bewildered, a shout was raised behind me.

"There's his capper; nab him, too!"

I saw and heard the rush toward me, and taking to my heels dashed away through the crowd, doubling around buildings, dodging under tent ropes, and leading the whole hue and cry toward the entrance where lay my only chance of escape. As I brought it in view my heart sank, for I saw that it was blocked with people and caught sight of the helmets of several policemen.

Turning away from the gate I ran along the fence, hoping to double on my pursuers and conceal myself somewhere, but emerging from behind a low, wooden building I

saw men and boys running to head me off. My situation was desperate; in a moment I should be hemmed in, with every avenue cut off, and the high board fence in front of me. Glancing hurriedly along this I saw a young man rigging a canvas shelter over a wagon, in the rear of which he had constructed a counter from which he was preparing to vend refreshments. The wagon stood only a few feet from the fence, and in a instant I had made up my mind that this was my last chance. Running toward it I sprang upon the wheel. It was a light affair and I heard the glasses crash as my impact sent them toppling. The proprietor gave a yell and made a lunge for me, but before his hand reached me I had sprung upon the seat and made a leap from there to the top of the fence, grasping it with my hands. The kick I gave as I sprang away completed the ruin I had begun, and his stock in trade went crashing to the ground with the wreck of the crazy counter. Throwing my leg over the fence I dropped to the other side, just in time to escape a fragment of a broken jar the frantic vender had hurled at me, and scrambling to my feet dashed away through the fields.

I did not stop running until I got completely out of sight of the last fluttering streamer on the highest pole in the enclosure, and then I threw myself down under a bank and lay there panting. I could see no sign of pursuit, and with the coming on of night made no doubt I should be safe; but I was sorely afraid that The Wonder had not got away. As soon as I got my breath a little I made a circuit, and came out upon the road we had traveled in the morning, and here I watched, concealed in the fields, in the hope of seeing him pass. Many wagons repassed along the road and groups of people, talking and laughing, but there was no sign of my companion, and at last, when I could see no longer, I gave up and turned toward the town. I went directly to the place where we had camped by the railroad, half hoping that I would find him there, and although

disappointed in this, I rebuilt the fire and sat down beside it to wait.

I passed the night there, sleeping and waking, but The Wonder never came, and when morning dawned I gave up all hope of him and realized that I was again alone with a solitary way before me.

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## CHAPTER XVIII

### I CONTINUE MY JOURNEY ALONE AND FALL UPON EVIL DAYS

WITH the first gleam of day I left the town, making my breakfast as I walked along and keeping a sharp lookout for policemen, for I was still haunted by my fears of the day before. Indeed, nothing but a feeling of loyalty to The Wonder had kept me there over night. As I passed out of the freight yards, between the long lines of cars, I was startled to see a figure spring up from the track at a considerable distance ahead of me and whip out of sight behind a car. I had barely caught a glimpse of it so quickly did it move, but I stopped and considered. It couldn't have been The Wonder; he had no reason to avoid me. Could it be one of my pursuers from the Fair? My panic returned in a moment, and slipping through the cars on the opposite side I climbed down the embankment and struck into the fields, and did not return to the tracks until I had left the town far behind.

And now came more days of walking and nights of sleeping in fields and outbuildings, broken at last by an all-night ride on a car of building stone, where I lay squeezed, cramped, and wakeful in a position fraught with some danger to my arms and legs if the load had shifted; and I was not sorry when the car was switched upon a side-track in the gray of the morning, and I was able to escape from my hiding-place and stretch my legs again upon the ground.

The morning was raw and chill and a leaden sky hung overhead, but I was so exhausted for want of sleep that I

struck into the woods at the side of the track, and throwing myself down upon a pile of dead leaves and twigs, slept deeply for hours.

I awoke shivering, and found that a cold, drizzling rain was falling and that I was wet through. I stamped up and down under the dripping trees trying to get some warmth into myself, and for the first time became conscious of sharp pains through my body and of a dull, hammering headache. I tried to kindle a fire to dry myself, but everything was sopping wet and I could scarcely induce even the match to burn. In the end I gave it up, and seeking the railroad again, walked into the town.

It was a small, dreary place in a half-cleared forest of scrubby trees, through the half-bared limbs of which the autumn wind made but melancholy music that morning as I limped along the one straggling street, the only figure visible anywhere. I went up to the principal building, which appeared to be a general store, and raising the latch went in. Three or four men sat around a stove in the middle of the room smoking and spitting. They all looked up as I entered and stared at me. Addressing one of them, who was in his shirt-sleeves, and whom I took to be the storekeeper, I observed that it was a wet morning outside. He made no reply to this greeting and, half twisting his chair around so that it hung upon one leg, shot a long, amber stream of tobacco juice from his lips that struck the overheated stove with a hiss and ran down its length till it sizzled out, adding a new decoration to the many others of similar origin that graced its surface.

"If you have no objection I would like to dry my clothes before the fire," I continued.

No one making any reply to this second salutation, I moved up to the stove and stood with my back to it till I had raised quite a cloud of steam, when I turned myself round, and in this manner, in course of time, got myself reasonably dry.

The spectators seemed greatly interested in my proceedings and pulled away at their pipes in silent contemplation, not one of them having spoken a word since I entered the door. When I had finished drying myself I took from my pocket what remained of my diminished provisions and ate my belated breakfast, after which I again ventured to address myself to the circle in general, and asked if they could tell me what time there was a train going west?

"Well, I'll be dinged!"

It was the man in his shirt-sleeves who spoke, and he brought his chair down on all its four legs and stared at me with his palms spread out on his knees.

The other men all stared at me in their turn and then stared at the man in his shirt-sleeves, and then all shook their heads together and spat at the stove. All but one man, and he spat generally in an upward direction, over his shoulder.

"P'raps *you're* goin' to St. Looey, too?" inquired the man in his shirt-sleeves, after easing himself of this exclamation.

"I—I—what do you mean?" I stammered, taken off my guard, and apprehending I know not what from this startling inquiry.

The man in his shirt-sleeves regarded me deliberately.

"'Bout—how long ago wuz it, boys?" he asked, breaking off and turning to the others.

One suggested half an hour, another twenty minutes, and the third ten.

"'Bout ten or twenty minutes ago, or mebbly half an hour," said the man in his shirt-sleeves, guarding against the possibility of a mistake, "a feller kem in here, in the door, the very door ez you kem in, an' he sez, speakin' ginerally to me and the boys, he sez, 'Pretty middlin' wet outside, gents,' or words like them. I don't allow to give 'em to you exact, but thet wuz pretty nigh their drift if I'm not mistaken." He looked around, inquiringly.

There was a corroborative murmur from the men about the stove, and there seemed to be an impression that the man in his shirt-sleeves, by qualifying and safeguarding his statement in this manner, had rested it upon unassailable foundations.

"He kem in here," resumed the man in his shirt-sleeves, staring at me with such absorption that when he made another shot at the stove he didn't even follow it with his eye, although I thought the sizzling and sputtering that followed, testifying to the correctness of his aim, brought a gratified look into his face, "he kem in here an' he backed up to thet stove like you done an' dried hisself off. Then he totes his grub outer his pocket, done up in a printed paper, and feeds hisself similarly like you done. Then," said the man in his shirt-sleeves, letting his gaze travel slowly round the circle of faces, while his own took on a look of mingled solemnity, severity, and grave alarm, "then he sez, 'Gents,' sez he, 'what time mout thar be a train goin' west?' sez he. Them wuz his words, ez near ez I kin remember 'em. 'Gents,' sez he, 'what time mout thar be a train goin' west?'"

"Did he inquire——" I began eagerly, but the man in his shirt-sleeves held up his hand.

"P'r'aps," he said, with truculent politeness, "you thought ez how I wuz through? P'r'aps you allowed, becauz I eased up my hosses, thet I wuz off the downgrade an' could be druv by without noticin'? P'r'aps it's my style to be druv by, an' p'r'aps it ain't!"

With a slow, superior smile the man in his shirt-sleeves again consulted the faces around the stove, as if to elicit from that quarter an expression of opinion as to which style was there understood to be his.

"No, young feller," he continued, interpreting the indignant looks of reproof which were directed at me on all sides as confirmatory of his own opinion of his style, "I ain't to be druv by. When I fetches up with the brake hard down, *you* kin take the road, but ontill sich time ez I do



no one *as* knows me will try it on fur to drive by me, unless in a very keerless and onthinkin' frame of mind."

Slowly shifting his tobacco into the other cheek he regarded me steadily for some moments, to see if I would make any further attempt to drive by him.

"Gents," he sez," resumed the man in his shirt-sleeves, after satisfying himself that I had been fully subdued, "what time mout thar be a train goin' west?" 'Thar ain't none,' sez I, speakin' up, 'as stop here ontill night.' 'No train ontill night,' sez he, sputterin'-like. 'Nary one,' sez I. He seemed disapp'inted, the feller did, purty bad, an' walked up an' down here afore the counter like he wuz cussin' to hisself. 'They wuz a freight,' he sez, 'as I jest got off'n, as went through ef I hed hed sense enuf to stay onto, an' now I'm ditched,' he sez. 'Whar mout you be goin'?' sez I. 'St. Looey,' sez he, 'an' I ain't goin' to lose no time here, nuther,' an' with thet he makes for the door, the feller does. Ez he wuz goin' out I hailed him an' I sez, 'How yo' goin' to get thar 'thout no train?' 'Walk,' sez he, gingery like, 'thar ain't no kid goin' ter beat me thar while I got legs, ef he does ride on stun cars,' sez he, and out he goes. And now," said the man in his shirt-sleeves, throwing himself back in his chair and bespeaking the attention of the others, with a wink of portentous solemnity, so long drawn out that it made his face quite one-sided, "p'r'aps *you're* goin' to St. Looey, too?"

"I am," I said, calmly.

"I knowed it!" cried the man in his shirt-sleeves, triumphantly. "I knowed it!" He gazed at the men about the stove and shook his head. "Boys, I ain't sooperstitious, but I tells you, I tells you candid, this gits me!"

"Was it a—rather long-legged young man," I inquired, hesitating whether it might now be permissible to drive by the man in his shirt-sleeves, "that came in here?"

"I ain't sayin' how long his legs wuz," replied the man in *his shirt-sleeves*, steadily declining to be drawn away from

the main facts, "but he kem in here, in thet door, an' used words similarly used by you; he dried hisself afore thet stove; he et his grub outen a noospaper; an' he sed he wuz goin' to St. Looley." The coincidence was too much for the man in his shirt-sleeves and he shook his head again and stared helplessly at the stove, as if he doubted any good coming of it.

I was now impatient to get away, no longer doubting that The Wonder was looking for me and had been following my track. In all likelihood he had walked on to the next town, thinking I had gone on with the freight train. If I hurried, I might even now overtake him.

I went to the door and looked out. The rain had increased and the wind with it, and the thick, lowering sky made the early afternoon dark as twilight. A solitary wagon, drawn by a steaming, bedraggled horse with drooping ears and tremulous tail, was floundering slowly down the muddy street, and in all that dour prospect there was nothing else save black, wet houses, bare, tossing trees, and pouring, leaden sky.

I turned up my coat collar. If The Wonder could follow me in weather like this, I could follow him. As I opened the door I looked back at the men around the stove. There they sat just as they had sat when I came in, just as they had probably been sitting since breakfast, and just as they probably continued to sit till supper.

I nodded my acknowledgments to the man in his shirt-sleeves. "I'll have to walk, I guess," I said, "if there's no train. I can't wait till night."

The man in his shirt-sleeves brought his fist down emphatically upon his knee.

"Boys," he said, "I'm not sooperstitious, but I tells you, I tells you candid, this—gits—me!"

With my hat brim pulled down and my hands in my pockets, I set out along the wet, slippery ties. At every step the water sloshed from my broken shoes, while the cold

wind pierced my very vitals. As I pushed resolutely on, the day grew steadily darker, the rain came down in ever-increasing torrents, and the wind grew in violence. Buffeted and drenched I staggered on, with my teeth chattering in my head and a cold, shaky feeling inside of me. Hour after hour and still nothing ahead but the wet, glistening rails; nothing overhead but the dull, lowering sky; nothing on either hand but the swaying trees and the gray, soppy fields.

And so from day to night, from leaden sky to black sky, from tossing trees to rustling, invisible shapes, from gray fields to blots of illimitable waste, from rain to rushing walls of water, from wind to howling, shrieking demons. No light anywhere, no kindly stars in the heavens, no sound save the rushing of the wind and the beating of the rain.

A nameless fear crept over me, a terrible loneliness. I stood still and strained my ears and listened. The roaring wind seemed to shake the ground as it passed; to the eye it did change momentarily, even in that blackness, the aspect of the scene, for as it swept along it bowed all standing things before it in flashing billows; grass and trees bent as it passed and showed, or seemed to show, changes of color, and rolling back again in receding waves, as the thunderous gusts tore on, gave the appearance of the solid earth heaving as from some seismic convulsion. Awed and terrified I dropped down there in the blackness and beating storm, and stretched out my hands and touched the cold, wet iron rail and even laid my cheek against it; I was alone with the elements, but man had been here, this was man's work, my own human kind.

But as I lay huddled there, icy chills again swept over me, and my very bones seemed to rattle. I sprang up and stumbled on, hugging myself together, but the cold was inside me, there was no warmth in my blood, and I shook and chattered in the grip of the deadly ague. And then, as suddenly, I went hot all over, and my flesh, from shiver-

ing cold, burned and tingled with the rush of fever. Dull pains shot through my legs and back, and my temples began to hammer. There was a singing in my ears and strange fires danced before my eyes. Dizzy and reeling, I grasped at the empty air, turning round and round, groping in the blackness with my hands as my mind was groping in a blackness as deep, till I stumbled and fell and knew no more.

How long I lay there I do not know, but I came to myself with my head lying upon the rail, my hat off, and the rain beating into my upturned face. Painfully I got to my feet and staggered on. The burning fever had passed and my head was clear, but the fearful aches in my body remained; but my one thought was to go on; I must overtake the one friend I had; I must find him and shelter, or die. I do not know how long I dragged myself on, whether it was hours, or only a few minutes, but suddenly there was something white distinguishable in the darkness at one side, and I stopped. It was the warning post indicating the crossing of a wagon road, and in a few more steps I stood upon the planking between the rails and looked to the right and left as far as the darkness permitted, along its track. No sign of habitation was anywhere visible, but the chances were favorable that it led alongside fields or farm land where some shelter, either of hayrick or outbuilding, might be found, and making up my mind to risk it I turned off at the right and followed its course.

The force of the storm was less severe here than on the exposed tracks above and I made pretty good progress, keeping a sharp lookout on both sides for anything that promised asylum for my drenched and racked body. My fear was that another attack like the last might overtake me at any moment and leave me insensible upon the road.

At last I made out through the darkness on my right the indistinct bulk of what appeared to be a stack of hay in a field, and branching off I plunged into the underbrush

that lined the road and made for it. I gained it after much floundering in the mud and water of the furrowed field, and it proved to be a heap of dried cornstalks. I found it no easy matter to burrow into this sodden mass, but after a time succeeded in making a hole large enough to receive my body, when I crawled in and drew the displaced stalks over the opening. I was not warm and I was not dry, but I was not exposed to the full fury of the storm and it was some rest for my exhausted body.

There I passed the slow hours of the night, the rain steadily dripping and soaking through my covering to my body, and there twice over before morning I was seized in the grip of the ague, followed each time by the burning and delirium of fever. Yet I believe I slept; I believe I was sleeping when the darkness lifted and the light of day pierced the interstices above my head and appeared to me a new light of hope as well.

The rain still fell heavily and the wind, though diminished in force, was still nothing less than a gale. I made my way out of the field, and coming out upon the road again set off, without thought of the direction I was taking, as fast as my stiffened limbs would bear me. While it was day and I had my legs and was free from delirium, I must find succor or succumb in some ditch somewhere, in the end.

It was apparent that the road I was on was not a highway, being narrow and ill made, a mere trail in fact, and it lay for the most part through the uncleared forest. Still, I argued, it must lead somewhere and the field and corn stack denoted farm buildings not far away if I could only find them. But I walked on and on and no sign of habitation appeared anywhere. The country became more wild and desolate with every mile, and even the road appeared at last to be growing less plain and traveled.

At last I realized that I had taken the wrong direction, *and in all probability* was going away from and not toward

the help I sought. I sat down upon the stump of a tree and wrung the water from my hair, and for the first time felt that despair was settling upon me. I had lost The Wonder again, after all but putting my hand upon him; I might never come so near to him again. I had a growing sickness upon me that any hour might stretch me upon the ground in these solitary woods never to rise again, and my bones might rot there unseen by the eye of man.

I got wearily to my feet and, steadying myself with my hand on the stump, took one last look ahead in the direction I had been following; and as I looked the wind parted the low-growing branches of the trees and revealed, right ahead, the wall of a house and the rough stones of a chimney! I dashed the water from my eyes, doubting if it were not the fever again, but no, there it stood, only a few yards away, a house of some sort alongside the deserted road.

I ran ahead and soon stood before it. It was a small, rectangular building of logs with a wide, uncovered doorway in the side facing the road, an outside chimney of loose stones through which the light peeped, and a sunken roof on which grass and weeds had taken root and grew rankly. In front, by the side of the road, stood a great stump with an iron ring in the top, and scattered about it in the grass lay several rusty horseshoes and a broken wheel-tire. I went up to the door and looked in. A forge full of cinders stood in the corner, but the bellows had been taken away, and the hard, earth floor was strewn with broken bits of rusty iron and parts of wagon gearing.

Although I was disappointed in finding the place deserted, it would at least afford me shelter from the rain while I got my needed rest, and stepping in, I found it perfectly dry except where the rain had beat in at the door, and, what pleased me as well, saw a rough bench of plank built against the wall in the far corner. I took off my outer suit of clothes, scarcely recognizable as the ones I had done

so carefully in my bundle, spread them out on the forge, and digging down into the cinders with my hands, saw that I could keep a lasting fire there if I could find anything to kindle it with. I wrenched loose one of the planks from the workbench, and whittling some shavings from it with my jack-knife, broke up the rest, and soon had a good fire going.

And now for the first time I perceived that there was a sort of loft overhead, extending about a third of the way across the room, and some broken parts of a ladder nailed against the wall in a corner disclosed the means of access to it. I immediately climbed up to investigate, and discovered a pile of horse fodder in a corner, which I threw down into the room below. There was nothing else there but a broken horse-halter hanging from the roof and a rusty hayfork without a handle. Satisfied with the discovery of the fodder, which would make an excellent bed, I descended again after ripping up three or four of the floor boards for the fire.

In a short time my outer clothes had become dry, and piling the fodder upon the bench, I spread them over it and had provided a very good bed; all I lacked indeed to my present comfort was something to eat.

As the day wore on there was no abatement of the storm. I mended the fire at intervals and kept my bed, dozing fitfully, but always, as I sank into deeper sleep, starting fearfully. I had a horror of falling into a sleep from which I might not waken. For I knew that my fever was rising again and I fought to keep my mind clear, to keep awake, not to listen to the sounds in my ears, not to see the shapes in the air. When I felt myself being overpowered, and knew that in another moment I would sink into the abyss of delirium, I would spring from my bed and shake off the shadow, confronting myself with what I knew were realities. This was the fire, and I would *rake up the cinders* over it and fan it into a glow; there was

the door and outside the rain was still falling, the day darkening to its close; here was my firewood; I must break up some more to have it ready. But always as I went back to my bed and my flesh grew hotter and hotter, and my temples throbbed higher and higher, the old sensations returned—the inability to separate my feverish fancies, *knowing* that they were fancies, from the actual things around me, *knowing* that they were actualities. I knew that I was lying on the bench, that it was nailed fast to the wall and could not be floating through the air; I knew that the walls of the cabin were not receding, that it was their rough surface I touched when I put out my hand; I knew that there were no shapes moving about the room, no music playing anywhere; that I must fight down these things and keep awake. . . .

I started up. Had I been asleep? No, there was the fire burning briskly, I must have mended it within a few moments. Yet it was pitch-dark outside and it had been day before—or was it real darkness I saw out the door there, or was it fever? I would get up and see, it should not master me this way, I must fight. . . . I fell back on the bed with a groan; my head was bursting, I could not hold it up, and there was a strange weakness in my limbs. In a moment it would pass . . . then I would get up . . . I must not forget to get up. I closed my eyes. Now I was rocking gently in a boat, I could hear the water lap its sides musically, but with a desperate effort I threw it off again; this was my bed of straw, I struck it with my hand; there was the fire; there was the door and the blackness outside. Ah, I was going to get up to look out, I had nearly forgot. . . . Was that a shape between me and the door? I looked at it steadily; it did not vanish. I would close my eyes for a moment and open them again and it would be gone, so, while I counted ten slowly; now I would look again. It was still there . . . it was moving toward me. The sweat started from my forehead; if I could not will



this shape to vanish, I was lost. I would leap out and meet it and strike it through, there *could* be nothing there! I struggled to rise, but fires flashed before my eyes, and horror! the shape was bending over me, its hand descended upon my forehead. . . . I screamed. . . . The walls of the cabin flew apart and I was walking on the shore of a placid sea. Ships with their gleaming sails danced on the rippling waves, and the sun was shining, birds were singing, and the air was sweet with the perfume of flowers. Now I stood upon the deck of one of the ships and looked down through the clear water. There on the clean, white sand sparkled pearls and wondrous gems. Fishes darted through wreathing branches of many-colored coral, flashing brightly in the sunlight. I ran from side to side upon the great, smooth deck and looked at the green islands slipping by, whereon were birds of gorgeous plumage and trees bent to the water's edge under their load of luscious fruit; I had only to reach out my hand and pluck them and eat. And we sailed to a sunny shore and there, running down to meet me, I saw them, oh, best-loved faces, smiling and happy! And, lo, there are the realities, these that I had fought against! And the other horrid memories, the rude cabin, the bed of straw, the storm, the cold, the aching body; those were the fantasies!

## CHAPTER XIX

### A MYSTERIOUS VISITANT

**A**N oppressive weight upon my limbs, and breast, and forehead; a strained soreness in all my muscles; a tugging ache in all my bones. Where was I? What had happened? I lay still with my eyes closed and tried to think. Somewhere, I could not think where nor when, someone, I could not think who, had told me to sit still and keep my mouth shut or I would get it full of cinders. Who was it? But wait, I could think beyond that now—there had been a crowd about a table and someone had handed me some money and said, "Shove that in your pocket, son." Who was that? I tried to concentrate my thoughts upon the scene; there was a face and a name I should remember. Bermondsey? No, that was not it, yet there had been such a name, too, but it didn't seem to go with the face. Jim? No, not that either, but there had been a Jim, too, somewhere. My head began to throb, I was weary, weary; I would not try to think now, I would go to sleep. But wait, I must fix the fire first. Now that was odd; I couldn't think where the fire was. Was it in a cave under a sidewalk where footsteps echoed overhead? No, that was before, a long time before. But the fire must be fixed immediately, and I *must* think where it was; something would happen, something terrible if I did not fix it at once. But never mind, I remembered that there were men seated round it, one man in his shirt-sleeves, he would attend to it; I would go to sleep. But how could he make it burn with all this rain falling, and wet cornstalks do not make a good fire? Cornstalks? Why, that

was *after* someone had said, "Shove it in your pocket, son." I must go back. I had been following someone on a railroad track—who was it? But never mind, I would go back to that afterwards—I had been walking on this track and something had happened, that was why I was lying here and couldn't move my legs. No, that was not it either; it had happened after I left the railroad. There had been a house with a wide door—ah, that was where the fire was, but it didn't matter now, the man in his shirt-sleeves would fix it—and I had been asleep in this house and had started to get up to see if it was dark outside. Now I remembered, I had been sick and, and—merciful God! Had I been buried alive!

The sweat started from my face and ran in hot rivulets down my cheeks. I lay still and dared not try to move, dared not open my eyes for fear I should feel and see the narrow confines of a coffin. Slowly I endeavored to raise my knees; I could not, except for an inch or two, my ankles and feet seemed to be held down by a weight; so also with my hands. What could it mean? Fearfully, prayerfully, I opened my eyes for one swift look and closed them again suffused with grateful tears. I had seen the blessed light; more I cared not for then.

But my brain would not stop working. Slowly and laboriously I picked up the broken threads of memory and wove them together. Now I had them all: the bed on the bench in the deserted smithy, the fever, the delirium, the storm. But what else had happened? I opened my eyes again and stared above me. There were the cracks in the loose flooring of the loft. I could count them: one, two, three, four, five. I couldn't see any more on that side without turning my head; on the other, one, two, three, four, five, six, seven to the wall. In the room I could see the top of the forge with the fire burning in it, the door and the green trees outside, and noted with astonishment that it was broad *day* and that the sun was shining brightly. But had I stood

those boards against the door that way? Surely not, or if I had it was after the fever came on. But what was the matter with my legs and arms, why couldn't I move? I looked down the length of my bed at my feet, but they were covered up; all my body was covered up to my chin. Was that my coat across my breast? And what was this weight upon my forehead? I gave my head a quick shake from side to side and a folded and dampened cloth, a handkerchief it looked to be, fell down on my shoulder. I turned my face and looked at it in astonishment; what was this mystery? My curiosity thoroughly aroused, and, in some degree, my fears excited, I made a vigorous effort to free my arms, but they were firmly bound to my sides, and as I strained and twisted my body I felt the same restraint across my breast. By rolling from side to side as far as I was able I succeeded, after some minutes of patient effort, in dislodging the coat thrown over me and finally it slipped to the floor, when I saw that a rope passed over my body, confining my arms, and passed under or was secured to the bench upon which I lay. A second glance told me that it was the identical halter I had seen in the loft above!

The first effect of these discoveries was to cause me the greatest alarm, and I could reason no farther than to be sure that whoever had made me prisoner in this way would return presently and murder me. But by degrees I could think of the matter more calmly, and argued that if he had been an evilly-disposed person he would scarcely have taken the trouble, before finishing me, to truss me up in this manner, cover me up with his coat, replenish the fire, and leave a wet cloth on my forehead. It seemed certain, therefore, that whoever he might be, his ministrations had been friendly in intent. As I turned it over in my mind it came to me with a flash. It was The Wonder! Surely, it was he and no other; what a blockhead I had been not to think of him before! He had evidently followed me, at some distance, to this place, found me raving with fever,

probably violent, and had secured me to the bed in this way while he went for help, after making everything as tight and comfortable as possible.

Arriving at this simple solution of the mystery, I lay still and gave up trying to free myself, patiently awaiting my faithful friend's return, and as the effort of puzzling it all out had wearied me, in my weakened state, I soon closed my eyes again and went off to sleep.

A delicious smell of something hot and steaming was wafted across my nostrils and I awoke and sat up. My bonds had been removed and on the edge of the bench by my hand stood a crock of simmering broth, a big thick piece of bread beside it, and a small round pasteboard box, which I opened and found to contain one white pill. I dipped the bread in the broth and ate, and, oh, but it tasted good! It was like The Wonder to make me soup, and he knew how to make it, too, if I was any judge! I glanced curiously around the room and noted the improvements he had made. The boards stood against the doorway reduced the opening by one-half, and contributed not a little to the seclusion and comfort of my refuge. A large pile of firewood, evidently gathered from the forest, lay drying on the floor, and a couple of boards ranged from the forge to the wall across the corner of the room formed a convenient table, whereon were disposed the utensils he had used in his culinary operations. There was an air of order and domestication about the whole place quite remarkable considering the limited extent of the housekeeping.

After I had finished the bread and broth down to the last crumb of the one and the last drop of the other, I took out the pill, and reflecting that where only one had been left there couldn't be much uncertainty about the size of the dose, gulped it down, and lay down again to await The Wonder's return. That he hadn't returned before seemed a little strange, but the chances were that he was *off on some foraging expedition*, and restraining my impa-

tience as best I could, I stretched my still sore and weary body upon the bed and dozed the time away.

I must have fallen at last into a deep sleep, for when I was roused by hearing a noise like the clatter of tinware and started up, staring eagerly about me, the room was in darkness save for the flickering light of the fire; but by that uncertain light I was positive I caught a fleeting glance of a figure as it slipped quickly through the door out into the darkness. At my side stood another crock of broth, a piece of bread, and a single pill in the round box. More than ever mystified at the strangeness of The Wonder's conduct, I felt a growing petulance at what I conceived to be his attempt to play a joke on me, in which I saw nothing funny at all, and called his name aloud with some indignation:

"Aw, I saw you now, Wonder! Think you're funny, don't you?"

No reply came from the darkness and no sound of him anywhere, and raising my voice, which was strangely weak, I cried again:

"Come on in here now, you Wonder! Don't think you can fool me, because you can't. I saw you, all right!"

Still no answer was returned. I could hear the trees rustling in the night wind, and once, as I listened, the faint, far-off whistle of a train was borne to my ears. With sudden resolution I swung my legs off the bench and started to get up, but as my feet touched the floor my knees collapsed, my head spun round, and I sank in a heap on the ground. It was with the greatest difficulty that, after lying there helplessly some moments, I slowly dragged myself up and clambered again into bed, sweating all over with the exertion. Plainly I was as much a prisoner there as if my bonds had been still about me. But what could The Wonder's object be in thus avoiding my sight while ministering to my wants so faithfully? It was more than I could guess, and I ate my bread and soup and took my pill

with a good deal of sulkiness, promising myself that, when he did choose to show himself, I would give him a piece of my mind upon the subject in a way that he would not quickly forget.

During the night I had another chill, but not so violent as the preceding ones, and, though my fever rose after it, I did not lose my head, and when it began to subside fell into a deep sleep and slept till far into the day. My food and solitary pill were in their place as before when I opened my eyes and sat up, and I made my breakfast with zest. Indeed, I had a growing appetite and I began to see that, as The Wonder didn't intend to appear to me, I should have to take my sleep regularly if I hoped to get my meals regularly. I experienced no difficulty in doing my part, however, during that day and night, for I was still so weak and my vitality so low that I slept most of the time, dropping off so quickly that I would interrupt myself in the middle of wondering how long it would be till I got some more broth. Always when I awoke it was ready for me, together with the pill, but I could have wished that The Wonder had made it something thicker and with more meat in it. Once, as a delicate hint that, like *Oliver*, I wanted some more, I turned the bowl upside down. The result was that the next time I woke I found only about half the usual quantity of soup in the bowl and two pills in the box. As a mark of my displeasure I ate the soup and left both pills, but it was a losing game for me, for the next time there wasn't any soup in the bowl and three pills in the box. I immediately swallowed them all in deep contrition, and thereafter the broth reappeared in full measure.

For three days and nights I was thus ministered to by my invisible attendant, and not once during that time did I catch a solitary glimpse of him or mark a single trace of his actual presence, beyond the regular appearance upon the side of my bed of my food and medicine and the steady burning of *the fire upon the forge*. At the end of that time I was so

far improved and confident of my strength as to turn over in my mind a plan to take my good angel unaware, and compel him to disclose himself. I would feign to be asleep, as usual, until I should hear him at my side, when I would spring up and seize him. In furtherance of this design I made a test of my ability to carry it out by getting out of bed one morning, after finishing my breakfast, and taking a turn about the room. Although my head was dizzy at first and my knees shook a good deal, I was so far encouraged by this experiment that I resolved to carry out my stratagem at once.

I got back into bed, and turning my face to the wall, practised in a low key a gentle snore, but this proving, after a little time, very wearing upon the nasal organs, and as I was by no means sure that sick persons snored at all as a rule, I decided to leave out this artistic touch, and waited in silence. But I had taken too little account of the probability of my being watched by my mysterious visitant, for after passing a most trying and nerve-racking forenoon, during which I nearly paralyzed one side lying in one position without moving, and he did not come, I was forced to conclude that I had been again outwitted and had only cheated myself out of my dinner. I could have cried with vexation when, after forcing myself to keep awake on a long and fruitless watch, I was finally forced, by weariness and exhaustion, to go to sleep in earnest and do it on an empty stomach.

I slept even longer than usual, and the twilight had fallen when I awoke. Before my eyes were half open I stretched out my hand mechanically to where my food always stood, but my fingers groped in vain along the edge of the bench, and directing my now wide-awake gaze there, I saw that the space was vacant. No supper was there! I now bitterly deplored my interference of the morning, that was like to cost me short and shorter commons, but as I sat on the edge of the bed swinging my legs disconsolately I lifted up my nose and sniffed. I had caught a whiff of the fragrant broth; it was



somewhere about, sure as guns! I jumped up and strode across the room to the shelf, and there, sure enough, stood my usual bowl and chunk of bread, no bigger for my fast at noon, and the pillbox alongside! I laughed aloud as I pounced on the food, but I needed no stronger intimation that my unknown host was aware of my newfound strength.

But a still harder blow was reserved for the morrow. On that day I felt better and stronger than at any time since my illness came upon me, and after my morning meal, instead of going back to bed, I walked about the room and inspected The Wonder's arrangements, and even took a turn outside the door in the sunshine, not wholly without expectation of discovering where he kept himself. The dark recesses of the wood enclosed the house on all sides, and he might easily have contrived for himself there a place of concealment. I went a little way among the overhanging trees and investigated a few hollow stumps, but my scrutiny was unavailing and I returned in a short time to the house, revolving in my mind other schemes for penetrating the mystery this eccentric Wonder had treated me to.

But once more he had stolen a march upon me. The moment I entered the door I had that vague and undefinable feeling that must be familiar to many people, who have suddenly entered a vacant room and felt, instinctively, that someone had left it a moment before. A hasty glance around confirmed my fears; the coat that had covered me, and which I had left on the bed, was gone; a new box of pills, quite full, stood on the improvised table; and what was this?—something marked on the smooth surface of the board. I snatched the board up and carried it to the door; roughly scrawled upon it in printed letters were these words, made evidently with a burnt stick from the fire: "Pills 3 Times a day Grub whenever you can don't sleep on the ground like a blame fool."

*I understood in a moment what it all meant. The Wonder*

had gone! I ran out into the abandoned road, and springing upon a stump, strained my eyes in the direction I had come, along its half-obliterated trail. He was nowhere in sight. I shouted his name. A few startled birds wheeled from the treetops and flew around in a circle, settling again in a moment, and all was still. The Wonder had gone and would not return.

My first impulse was to follow him, and I ran back into the hut and was struggling into my extra clothing when my pride flared up, and I took off my coat again and flung it on the bed. No, I would not follow him. If he chose to go off this way, after placing me under obligation to him by saving my life, I would not increase the obligation by running after him. So uncompromising was my newborn independence that, although I considered myself strong enough now to resume my journey, I decided to put it off another day, for fear I should overtake him and lay myself open to the suspicion of having followed in his tracks.

From this day to the day when I stood on the bank of the yellow flood they told me was the Mississippi, and looked across at the smoke and haze of St. Louis, I count two weeks. Those days belong to a part of my life I have willingly and thankfully forgotten. I will make no effort to recall it now. I know that but for a steadfast purpose that gave me, I suppose, some sort of moral backing, I differed in nowise from the tramps and vagabonds I encountered every day on freight trains and bivouacking along the tracks. I know that I asked and received my daily bread. I know that I passed nights in filthy cars and sheds, in the company of thieves and outcasts, who gambled for the last drink of whisky contained in the bottle the combined resources of all had served to fill. I know that I walked many days; that I lay hidden in cars where cattle and hogs had left their vermin; that I rode between cars, standing and clinging to the brake-rods. I know that neither hunger, nor cold, nor weariness, the brutality of train crews, the enforced society

of thieves, nor the shame and degradation of vagrancy served to weaken my purpose or to tempt me to turn my face from the way I was going.

It was late in the afternoon on a raw, windy October day when I stood at last at the end of the bridge that spanned the river to the Missouri city. But here I found, to my dismay, that a toll was asked, and turning away made my way down to the rock-paved levee, where I sat down and gazed moodily across at the forbidden city. After crossing half a continent this half-mile of water seemed likely to put an effective stop to my travels. The river was alive with steamboats, puffing up and down, and in and out; their overworked whistles sounding in every degree of hoarseness and shrillness. Fierce little tugs pushed unwieldy barges or towed long lines of floats, laden with freight cars, through the churning water; grimy, trampish-looking cargo-craft left tracks in the water as black as themselves; and spick-and-span passenger boats, glistening with white paint and brass railings, picked their dainty way among the mere working-craft with shuddering care.

I had watched this changing and novel scene for an hour when I became aware of a strangely assorted couple coming up the levee from the landing below. They were a man and a negro boy. The man was big and portly, with a smooth-shaven face and a mass of iron-gray hair falling over his collar. From his broad-brimmed felt hat to his shining boots, he was dressed with the care that makes good clothes look like a part of the man who knows how to wear them. The negro boy, barefooted and hatless, walked behind him, tugging at a creaking leather valise. As the man came up with me and turned his handsome bronzed face and gray eyes for an instant in my direction, I felt a sudden rush of confidence, and rose and stepped toward him, though a second before I had not the remotest intention of speaking to him.

"Too late, boy," he said, shaking his head and smiling,

before I had opened my mouth to speak, and at the same time swinging his cane toward the negro boy behind him; "job's let."

"It wasn't that, sir," I answered, in some confusion. The negro boy had instantly set the valise down, and was preparing to defend his job by moistening in turn the palms of his hands and then rubbing them together, while he rolled the whites of his eyes at me defiantly. "I—I have come a good way and don't know—I wanted to ask somebody, that is, if there is any way of getting across the river—besides the bridge, of course."

He looked at me curiously for a moment, and then turned and looked up at the bridge, and his hand wandered to his chin and tapped it thoughtfully.

"Umph," he said finally, when he had completed this double survey, "I could give you bridge-toll, I suppose, but—thirty years ago bridge-toll wouldn't have got *me* over."

He seemed to be speaking to himself more than to me, and his gloved fingers were still tapping at his chin.

"I'll tell you what, boy," he said, coming suddenly out of his preoccupation and looking down at me with his twinkling eyes, "you go down and see if you can find an old red tugboat that owns to the name of *Natchez*. She ferried me over in '55. You try the *Natchez*."

He nodded to the negro boy and started on again, grasping his cane by the middle and walking with his shoulders well thrown back. I watched them until they disappeared in the street above, with growing resentment. To be referred to a ferry that was running in '55 seemed to me a poor kind of joke for a gray-haired man to perpetrate on a stranger inquiring his way. But at any rate the possibility of getting across on some kind of freight-ferry seemed reasonable, and I set out along the levee, keeping my eye out for craft of this sort. I passed long lines of tugs of every size and description, lying at the various landings, with steam up

and lashed to their several convoys, all apparently about to start for somewhere, but to my timid inquiries I received the gruffest kinds of warnings to keep back and out of the way. At last, as the sun was lighting up the river with the last yellow rays of day, I came upon some railway tracks running down to the water. In the declining light I could see no more boats anywhere, and was about to turn back, when I caught sight of a thin curl of smoke coming up from behind the line of piles that supported the landing where the tracks ran out to the water. I stepped quickly down upon the wharf and looked over. There, directly under me, lay a dirty little tug, lying so low in the water as to be completely hidden, and upon her rail sat a one-legged man smoking a cigar and swinging his single leg, and directly under him was the name, *Natchez*, painted upon her bow in yellow letters!

The man looked up at me and I looked down at the man.

"Is this the *Natchez*?" I asked, hesitating between astonishment and doubt.

The man made no reply but pointed with his foot to the name below him.

"Oh, so it is!" said I, very much surprised. "I'd like to go across if I could, if you're going."

"Wull," said the man on the rail, passing his cigar into the other corner of his mouth, with a single roll of his tongue, "why don't ye?"

Interpreting this as an invitation to step aboard, I did so, and went and sat down where I thought I would be as much out of the way as possible. The man continued to sit on the rail till he had smoked his cigar out, when he swung himself down to the deck and yelled something through the engine-room window, and the next instant a terrific blast of the whistle sounded over my head and the little tug pushed out into the river. I then saw she was shouldering along a huge car-float on the other side. The course taken did not *lie directly* across the river but was diagonally up stream,

so that the passage consumed probably half an hour, and it was quite dark when we pushed in on the St. Louis side some distance above the bridge.


As I stepped off the boat I looked up at the shadowy form of the boatman standing on the little half-deck, watching the men on the landing making fast the lines, and called out my thanks. He may have grunted or it may have been the straining of the hawsers I heard, but he certainly did not speak and did not change his position.

I made my way across the tracks that led down to the water's edge and came out presently upon a lighted street lined with warehouses. Here the business of the day was over. Windows were shuttered, iron gratings stretched across doorways, and the street was silent and deserted. At a corner I stood still and looked about me. This was St. Louis; I had reached the place I had looked forward to so long; this was, if not the end, the final stage of my journey, but for the first time I was in a great city and without money, with no place to sleep, and hungry. Here were no friendly haystacks, no inviting orchards, no kind-hearted farmers' wives. Here were only the police and the vagrancy laws.

There was a quick step behind me, a hand was laid upon my shoulder, and a well-remembered voice said in my ear:

"Here, you carry this plugged quarter for a while; I haven't been able to get rid of it."

I sprang away and faced about. It was Harold Portal, and he was holding out his hand with the bad quarter I had left in the hollow tree!



## CHAPTER XX

### THE MAN IN THE BROAD-BRIMMED HAT

**T**RANSFIXED, I stood and gazed at him, speechless with astonishment, scarce believing the evidence of my senses. Yet, there he stood, Harold Portal, he and no other, with a grin on his face, and holding out the coin in his palm; ragged as myself, grimy as myself, but, unlike myself, no whit astonished or dumfounded, but visibly enjoying my amazement as I stood gaping there! But as I gradually recovered myself, and realized the enormity of the deception he had played upon me, my resentment was stirred, which the grin on Harold's face in nowise tended to mollify, and I believe my first welcoming impulse was to slap his face.

I walked up to him and pushed aside his outstretched hand with the money in it.

"So," said I, aggressively, "you did tag after me, eh?"

Harold drew himself up. "Excuse me," he said, loftily, "I beg to point out to you that I arrived here before you. It was you tagged me, I guess."

"I left home before you," I said, warmly.

"Yes, a few hours before, but on the other hand I beat you here by a few hours. Honors are even, I guess."

"You wouldn't have beaten me here only I was sick on the way."

"Pooh! I would have been here days ago only I——"

"Only you what? Yah! You don't think quick enough to talk to me. Let me pass!"

This last demand had no particular significance, as Harold *was not* preventing me from passing, and I had no wish to

pass, but I was on the defensive and found it necessary to say something high-sounding.

"Only," said Harold, deliberately, "I went out of my way to take care of a crazy person, and that detained me. Crazy people are rather exacting, you know."

His tone, his grin, the way he leaned up against the lamp-post on the corner, and thrust his hands into his pockets, and looked at me, carried a swift suspicion to my brain.

"You took care of someone," I demanded, "someone who was sick? Who was it, and where?"

Harold laughed. "He may have been sick too, but when a person has to be tied in bed to prevent him from walking into the fire, under the impression that he is going aboard ship, he is certainly crazy."

The truth came to me in a flash. It was Harold who had nursed me in the blacksmith shop, and not The Wonder! It was Harold whom I had seen dodge out of sight behind the cars, the morning after my escape from the Fair! It was Harold who had preceded me at the country store and roused the superstitious wonder of the man in his shirt-sleeves. He had followed me all the way and he had beaten me to my own goal!

"So," I said, slowly, as the full realization of how he had played it upon me forced its way into my reeling brain, "it was you who took my soup away and tried to starve me, was it? I should think you'd be ashamed of yourself!"

But so far from having any appearance of contrition, he threw his arms around the lamp-post and roared with laughter, till he could scarcely stand from the exhaustion of it.

"Ex-cuse-me-old-man," he panted breathlessly, between the explosions, "I can't—help it, upon my soul—I can't! It nearly kills me—to—laugh on an empty stomach, but, O Lord! you did look so funny lying there—pretending—to—be—asleep! and—and snoring, O Lord! Stop me, can't you, I'll break something in me. Throw some water on me. Oh, wow, wow, wow!"



Bent double with laughter, he went round and round the lamp-post, clinging to it with both hands and calling upon me to stop him, till he finally sank down upon the curb and sat there fanning himself with his hat, and weakly letting off his "wow, wow, wow" at subsiding intervals.

"You think it's pretty funny, don't you?" I said, savagely. "Well, if you want to know what I think of it, I think it was a low-down, measly trick, that's what I think, if you want to know. And you didn't gain anything by it, either. Why, if you'd let on it was you, I'd have come the rest of the way here with you and shown you a thing or two you probably don't know. I'll bet *you* didn't ride the blind, more likely you walked. Ha, ha, ha! you must have been a greenhorn to walk!"

Affecting to laugh uproariously at the way he had overreached himself in playing it on me, I essayed to make use of the lamp-post myself, but it wasn't very successful. Harold was so preoccupied in holding on to himself and wiping his eye on his sleeve, that he didn't even notice my efforts.

"Come," I continued, failing on this tack, "are you going to sit there snickering to yourself all night? Nobody else sees anything to laugh at."

Harold got weakly to his feet and dusted himself off. "Don't break it off in me that way," he protested. "I just couldn't help it, Sumner, you did look so funny, O Lord!" He went off in another peal of laughter and seized me round the neck to support himself while he had it out. "O Lordy, my stomach is all of a tremble, *don't* let me laugh! Stop me, can't you? There! I'm over it now; don't push me away, I'll fall down. Oh, wow, wow! Here, you haven't shaken hands with me yet, old man. Come, you're not stuffy,—give us your fin! I had to get even with you somehow, you know, and now we're quits."

Permitting myself to unbend a little, we shook hands heartily and continued up the street together.

"Now perhaps you'll tell me," I pursued, as we walked along, "what you came to St. Louis for?"

"For no other reason than to get away from where I was," replied Harold, lightly. "I told you I shouldn't stay there, you know. But now that I am here I don't mind telling you what I am going to do."

"What?" I asked.

"Eat something up," he replied, "as quick as I can. Come on, we'll try the lead quarter again."

We found our way to an eating-house and got some very good beef stew and graham bread, and Harold got five cents change back out of the quarter. Afterwards, as we set out to find a lodging, he told me how he had started on my track, the morning after I left.

"I knew Uncle Rand would get well," he said, "and I didn't worry about leaving him. But I wish you had waited a few days longer so I could have seen Starbright. However, I couldn't let you get that much start and I followed you next morning."

"You saw me leave, then?"

"Sure. I knew what was up when I didn't hear you go upstairs, and I watched and saw you cut away through the trees. I knew you'd steer this way. I hit your trail at Albany and I haven't been out of sight of you many hours since. Thought you were foxy, didn't you?"

"Do you suppose anybody'll look for us?" I asked.

"Pooh! Who's to trouble their heads? Too much else for 'em to think of just now. Question is, what'll *we* do? Now my idea is to hunt up old Syd; he's here somewhere, you know. Hunt up old Syd and find out what the chances are in this place. I believe," said Harold, in his old masterful way, and throwing a critical eye over the buildings across the street, "I think a fellow might do well here. Seems to be no slouch of a town."

We found a lodging high up in a house with a bulging front near the river, and the keeper said it would be just

as agreeable to him if we paid at once. We slept till far into the day, and then started out, greatly refreshed, to find our old school friend. We had no difficulty in locating his father's house with the aid of the directory, but Harold was of the opinion that we should defer presenting ourselves there until evening, when we would be more likely to find them at home.

"The servants aren't likely to know us," he said, grimly.

And now how differently the city looked to our eyes! We were no longer strangers and outcasts in it, bound to slip unobserved along the meaner streets, afraid to gaze in at the shop windows, conscious of being aliens and impostors; but citizens almost, with a place to go and friends. In a few hours Harold had acquired quite the air and manner of an old settler. Coming upon a street that we had possibly crossed once before, and recognizing it, he would say carelessly, "Ah! let's take a turn down Olive Street." Or noting some conspicuous building in the distance, he would not then draw my attention to it, but after identifying it himself would steer me off up some side street in another direction, and when we had proceeded a way he would stop, as if suddenly bethinking himself, and say, "Oh, come on down this way and I'll show you the Southern Hotel." Standing on the levee watching a big passenger boat coming up stream, he remarked familiarly, when she was close enough in for him to make out her name, "The old *Memphis* has got a pretty good load on to-day." To see him stand in front of a billboard and say, "Let's see what's going on at Pope's," one would be ready to take oath he had lived there all his life.

As the early dusk set in we turned our steps in the direction of Mr. Sydenham's house and rang the bell with some trepidation. Harold had succeeded in edging behind me when the door opened, so that when the colored servant looked out at us sharply it was his head she saw, and my feet, and the combination evidently did not produce a favorable effect upon her.

"What do yo' all want?" she asked truculently, and without waiting for a reply, proceeded to indicate some of the things we would get if we tarried there, and then slammed the door in our faces.

"Why didn't you say something to her?" demanded Harold, irritably, "I never saw such a sewed-up clam! Now like enough we won't get in at all."

"I say something to her!" I retorted. "What were you doing, I'd like to know? You're running this thing, not I. Ring the bell again."

"Yes, and have somebody come out and fire us into the street. Ring it yourself."

Very sulky and sniffy we sat down on the top step and gloomed. Once or twice I attempted to make a suggestion, but Harold snapped me up.

"Don't talk to me! You're a daisy to plan things, you are. Go and do it yourself. I'll sit here all night, that's what I'll do, I'll sit here and——" I think he was going to say "freeze," as he started to turn up his coat collar, but reflecting that the night was rather warm he turned it down again and said, "starve to death," instead.

How long we would have sat there, had not the deadlock been broken, I will not venture to guess, but an effective diversion was at hand. We heard a sprightly step coming round the corner, and the next moment a man swung into view and ran lightly up the steps, swinging a cane in his hand and humming a lively tune. We were sitting in the shadow of the stone posts that supported the doorway, one on either side of the door, and he did not see us until we sprang up from under his feet.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed, seizing me by the shoulder with a powerful grasp, "what's this?" He backed me up against the door and tilted up my chin. "Oh, it's you, is it? Well, did you find the *Natchez* all right?"

It was the man in the broad-brimmed hat!

## CHAPTER XXI

### MOSTLY COMMERCIAL

CALHOUN SYDENHAM, at the time he found us on his doorstep, was in the full tide of his successful career. He was rich, had good blood and good looks, knew what a horse was and could ride or drive one, was a judge of good whisky and could drink it as only a gentleman can; he was a thorough believer in the South and her destinies, an authority on cotton, a hater of the New York Produce Exchange, a Democrat, and fifty years old. Like many men of the old South, whose boyhood had been passed among negroes, he was superstitious; and while rejecting ordinary superstitions, was a slave to others, acquired by the habitual doing of certain things in the same invariable way, as always opening his letters face downward, ascending the stairs at his office on the left side and descending on the right, winding his watch with his thumb and third finger, and striking a match with his left hand and passing it into his right to light his cigar. While he would have flogged Frank for carrying a rabbit's foot he would have been driven to his bed by anxiety, if he had inadvertently reversed the order of any of these things.

To the queerest of his foibles Harold and I owed the good fortune that was ours from that night. We heard the story the next day from Frank. How, thirty years before, his father had come to St. Louis from Kentucky, in much the same condition that we had arrived there the day before, homeless, penniless, hungry, and without means of crossing the river. How, at last, after many rebuffs he had come upon the *Natchez*, as he had hinted to me on the levee.

"The self-same tub that Sumner struck," said Frank, "and old Gabe Price, that's her captain and owner now, and was a deckhand on her then, took him on and brought him over, yes, and gave him his dinner, too. That's the kind of a hair-pin Gabe was!"

Naturally our host never forgot that service, and the time came when he repaid it in a manner peculiarly his own. But not for many years; the war came first and he went with the South.

"The old *Natchez* put on a sheet-iron turtleback," said Frank, "and did her share on the other side, and Gabe stuck to her, and when it was all over and they came back, the *Natchez* to take off her shell and go to pushing coal cars again, old Gabe was minus one leg."

Mr. Sydenham was more fortunate; he came back with both legs and went into business. St. Louis, after the war, was a busy town, and he went into cotton and made money, made it fast; and after a while he did that for his old benefactor and late enemy which might have been expected from a Kentuckian favored by fortune. He bought the *Natchez*, and gave her to the man who had given him his passage and his dinner.

"Yes, sir," said Frank, "gave her to him outright! That's the governor's style, if you want to know! There was only one condition to the gift and that wasn't likely to go against Gabe's grain; it was that he should never refuse to ferry man or boy across the Mississippi River who should apply to him. Well, Gabe's added a few to the population of this town since then, I guess, but the governor is always looking for him to add one more. He's got the strangest notion," said Frank, lowering his voice, "that every time the *Natchez* brings over a passenger luck comes to him. He's always looking for 'em. He thinks I don't know, but he slips off down to the levee every once in a while and confabs with old Gabe and asks him about 'em. And whenever some poor devil gets a lift that way and the governor gets his streak

of luck, he goes looking for that fellow to reward him, and rates old Gabe because he don't take their names and addresses! Now look here, put these things together, will you. The day Sumner strikes the *Natches*, the governor's mare wins the Blue Grass Stakes at Lexington; the governor knows he was on the *Natches*, and comes home to-night and finds him on the doorstep. I tell you this is the greatest slice of luck Sumner's had since they took bibs off him! If the governor don't make his fortune I'm no prophet!"

Indeed, we had no reason to doubt the kindness of our host's intentions, and after a few days' rest had restored us in body and spirits, he broached the topic of our future one night at supper. He had already got our story and his comment had been brief, involving the expression of a doubt as to which was the bigger fool, Harold or I.

I shall not soon forget how Harold, pushing his plate away and throwing his arm over the back of his chair, said, in response to Mr. Sydenham's inquiry:

"Well, I did think I'd stay here and look round a bit. I rather like the looks of this town."

Mr. Sydenham nodded approvingly. "Have anything particular in mind?" he inquired.

"Well," said Harold, with the same appearance of thoughtfulness, "I did think I'd look into cotton a bit."

"Good!" exclaimed Mr. Sydenham, striking the cloth with his hand. "Good! What do you know about cotton?"

It appeared that Harold didn't know anything about it except that it grew on low plants and was picked by negroes who sang plantation songs as they worked.

"Umph!" said Mr. Sydenham. "You ought to go on the New York Produce Exchange and issue weekly letters to the Southern planters. You'd be a millionaire in a few months. And how about Bibbus,—is he interested in the staple, too?"

*Harold shook his head doubtfully.*

"Sumner don't know anything about cotton, I'm afraid, Mr. Sydenham," he said, forestalling my reply. "Besides I've something in mind for him already. Sumner shan't be forgotten." He looked at me kindly and nodded, as if to assure me that, however much occupied with larger affairs, he should not allow my claims upon him to be neglected.

Mr. Sydenham gasped. "Eh!" he said, looking in perplexity from Harold to me as if trying to find some basis for Harold's authority, either in some great disparity of years that he had not before observed, or in my mental irresponsibility perhaps. "Eh, you think he can do better?"

"Well," returned Harold, turning my case over in his mind as he leaned back in his chair and contemplated me with judicial thoughtfulness, "you see I've sort of taken Sumner's future upon myself. I'm pretty well acquainted with his disposition and capabilities, having studied 'em, and I don't know that Sumner would do well in business. I don't think his talents lie in that direction. I'd about made up my mind to make a journalist of Sumner, Mr. Sydenham."

"Journalism, eh?" said Mr. Sydenham, doubtfully. "Well, of course somebody has to publish the market reports. It's a very respectable calling, I believe, very respectable—within proper bounds, of course."

"Do you know any of the editors of the big papers here?" inquired Harold, feeling for his pencil to make a note of them. "I suppose they'll have to be seen. Time was when I expected to set him up with a paper of his own."

Mr. Sydenham shook his head decidedly. "I am not acquainted with any editors," he said, a trifle stiffly, "nor, so far as I recall, with any actors, fiddlers, or dancing-bears. I have been a business man all my life and attended to that business, and never disgraced myself nor my city."

On the whole I conceived the notion that our host did not think too highly of the profession of journalism.



"What do you think of it, Frank?" continued Mr. Sydenham, finding after a somewhat embarrassing pause that the floor was all his own.

Frank thought that journalism was all rot and that Harold and I had better go into the office the next morning and occupy the desk next to him.

"Very sensibly said," was his father's verdict. "We'll let it rest there and sleep on it."

We did sleep on it, and the next morning Frank took us into the office on trial to see how we liked it. We did like it, and I stayed seven years.

Although twenty years of uninterrupted prosperity had trebled, many times over, the scope and importance of Mr. Sydenham's business he still kept possession of the modest quarters up two flights of stairs, where he had begun, with a single clerk, to lay the foundations of his fortune. Many clerks now crowded one another within the narrow space, until it required some nicety of movement to thread one's way among their desks, and to avoid falling over the stacks of bills that littered the floor, for want of a better place of storage, but Mr. Sydenham steadily set his face against the introduction of the modern equipment of plate glass and brass railings, that most of his competitors now counted among their assets, and I believe would have taken his old clerk and his own battered desk and moved up another flight, and begun again at the beginning, before he would have countenanced them. This ancient clerk, whose name was Mr. Cressey, had his desk near the door, entirely surrounded by a wooden fence, which gave him the appearance of sitting in the middle of a four-poster bed; an illusion that was heightened by a habit he had of hanging his hat on one corner of it, his coat on another, and his umbrella on a third, and strangers, upon coming into the office, would look instinctively for his shoes on the fourth. Mr. Cressey was a little man, very bald and very pinched, with scanty and feeble-looking side-whiskers, and he suffered most of the

time with a cold in his head. He sat on the extreme edge of his stool and worked on the extreme edge of his desk, I always supposed from motives of economy, so as to save wear and tear on those articles of furniture, just as he always, in adding up a column of figures, jotted down the "carry" figure on his cuff, to save paper. But I was informed differently by the other clerks, who said that he shriveled into that position; that when he came in in the morning he would cover the stool like other people, and use the center of his desk, but that as the day wore on and his cold rose, as it did toward night, he would gradually pinch himself together until, at four o'clock, he had arrived at the position I have described. They said that if he should stay until five he would disappear under the desk. But whatever reason impelled him to occupy his seat in this manner, it was certain that the position was sometimes fraught with danger, for I have known him to sneeze so violently, and withal so unexpectedly, as nearly to hurl him from his perch to the floor. Mr. Cressey possessed Mr. Sydenham's entire confidence, and deservedly, but his long tenure of office had induced habits of authority that occasionally found expression in ways that were highly exasperating to the other occupants of the office. When Frank was introduced there he was (being rather a tall boy for his age) about two feet higher than Mr. Cressey, and that gentleman's cognizance of that fact, and of his own threatened supersession, was at once manifested by his having another row of pickets added to the top of his fence. But Mr. Sydenham had no intention of displacing an old and faithful servant, and being, moreover, a believer in Spartan methods of business training, had placed Frank directly under Mr. Cressey's orders. The first work he assigned Frank was to sweep the floor, that being his idea of beginning at the bottom, and so, by regular gradations, promoted him in course of time to window-washer. But Frank was too good-humored and amenable long to invite his superior's

distrust, and in my time they were very good friends indeed.

Harold and I had much the same experience at the start. In the first place I think Harold presumed a little too much upon the impression he had produced upon Mr. Sydenham, which was a fatal mistake, for it gave Mr. Cressey the delight of bringing his ignorance home to him in many unexpected ways, and for my part I let him learn too easily that he could scare me by coming behind me and looking over my work and snorting back of my ear. This was his invariable way of criticising, and it was of course very helpful and illuminating. Moreover, he had a maddening way of standing at my elbow, in patient and hopeful expectation of my becoming flustered under his scrutiny, and making some glaring error, feeding his anticipation meanwhile and my nervousness, by groping with his fingers in the scanty hairs of his bristling little side-whiskers and twitching them one by one, rolling them a moment between his thumb and finger and depositing them in a little pile on my desk. These persecutions were very hard to bear, and Harold used to resign every night on the way home and go in again the next morning, "to give old Cressey just one more chance." But before the year was out Harold ceased resigning, and even Mr. Cressey was obliged to confess to Mr. Sydenham that, "the red-headed one had the right stuff in him," a compliment in which I rejoiced as much as if it had not contained such an obvious implication that it wasn't in me.

Harold received this praise with equanimity as being no more than his due, and bade me cheer up.

"Cotton ain't your element, Sumner," he said, shaking his head. "I doubted it from the start. You'll recall what I said at the time. A man," said Harold, stretching out his legs, "a man has to be born to cotton, in a way, and you weren't. There's no gainsaying that, you weren't. I doubt if you were born to any staple," said Harold, considering the matter, "though, of course, I can't say what you would

do in wool, or possibly in silk, eh, Frank? But cotton, no; you might just as well look it in the face, old man, you weren't born to it."

"Well, I don't see," I said, a little nettled perhaps, "why it should require any more ability to make out bills of lading in a cotton house than in any other, and that's about all we've had to do so far, except that Cressey lets you label the bales on the levee steamer days because you can letter back-handed, and run to the bank because you're long-legged."

Harold shook his head pityingly. "That's just the point, Sumner," he replied. "That proves what I said. You *don't* see. You don't grasp the spirit of cotton, at all. You can't *think* cotton, you can see nothing in it but the mere labor, the mechanical part of it, and you miss the—the atmosphere of it altogether. The—the spirit, as I said. That's where you fail. You don't drink in the atmosphere, that's the whole secret. It ain't your fault, *you* can't help it, you just weren't born to it. And another thing, you lack *aplomb*, and that's everything in cotton, eh, Frank?"

Frank shook his head doubtfully, and didn't see how *aplomb* could be dispensed with.

"What are you fellows talking about!" I exclaimed, impatiently. "Do you expect me to believe that it needs an inspiration to buy and sell cotton any more than it does pork, or molasses, or anything else, and you're the only ones that get it? How about old Cressey; he looks inspired, doesn't he? But I reckon he might give *you* fellows points."

Harold smiled indulgently. "Old Cressey," he said, "is a machine, a mere machine, my dear fellow. He represents very respectably what I just now called the mechanical part of the business, or, more properly, science, for cotton *is* a science. He does the drudgery very well; I don't know," said Harold, thoughtfully, "that I know anyone who could do that class of work better. But you don't for a moment imagine that old Cressey reflects upon what he does? You

don't suppose he is animated by the impelling fires of genius, that leap and burn in the brains of men who are born to cotton, or poetry, or generalship, or finance? Old Cressey belongs to the class of men who are run by springs, and can never belong to any other. He's a plodder, a man who can only accomplish things by laborious effort, and bodily tugging and straining. There's no genius in that,—he might as well be in the grocery business. It's brain-force that cotton demands, the faculty to lay back and *think* and *plan*, eh, Frank?" said Harold, throwing *himself* back in the required position,—“the faculty of keen, sure, swift, and unerring judgment, the faculty of calm but quick decision, lightning-like strokes of policy and Napoleonic conceptions of—of—well, of policy, as I said. That's what cotton demands.”

“Oh,” said I, sarcastically, “that's what it demands, is it?”

Harold swung his legs up on the desk, and resting his elbow in his hand, let his fingers wander caressingly over his upper lip.

“That's what it demands. Now you ought to look these things squarely in the face, Sumner. You don't want to become a drudge like old Cressey. You ought to be thankful that you have discovered thus early that cotton ain't in you. Now you've made the discovery, act on it. Rouse up,” said Harold, slapping me on the shoulder encouragingly, as if I were in a state of lethargic despair from which I had refused to be rescued, “rouse up and have another try. Don't let life down you at your age, get your wind and go at it again; keep on hammering! That's the only way to succeed. And never forget, old man,” said Harold, slapping me again on the shoulder, “never forget that I am at your back, ready to help you every time you get bowled over. And there's Frank. Frank'll stand by you, too. Why, Sumner, old boy, you ain't put over the ropes yet by a long shot, and won't be while Frank and I stand by. Give him *your* *fin*, Frank, and here's mine; we'll shake on that all

round. Remember, hand to hand, we'll stick to Sumner to the last ditch!"

They both shook hands with me with a great deal of feeling, and though Frank looked as if he didn't have any very clear idea what it was all about, he was too much under the spell of Harold's masterful superiority to doubt that my situation required this demonstration on their part to prevent my giving up altogether and sinking beneath the waves of adversity. Indeed, I suppose, if Harold, in order to save me from myself, had kindly but firmly discharged me on the spot, he would not have considered the act to require anything more than a purely perfunctory ratification on the part of our employer.

Many other things happened during this year. Harold wrote to Starbright, disclosing our whereabouts, and her reply made known to us the events following our departure. Her father was recovered, and with what was left to them they were embarking to China, there to begin anew at the foot of the ladder. She had no reproach for us, and, indeed, knew no other motive for our action save our desire to lighten the burden of her father. She wrote hopefully and cheerfully of the future, and dwelt upon the time when they should return and we should come back to that roof which was our home and hers. She hoped and prayed that the time might come when it should again shelter all those heads that had once known its contents, its happiness, and its duties. She wrote no other word of the fugitive.

I think it came to both of us as we read this letter that Starbright was no longer a child, but a woman. I think it came to us that she was a good woman. Harold was restless for some days after its receipt, and studied a map a good deal that hung on the wall at the office, showing the ocean routes to Asia, and once he asked Mr. Cressey if there was any cotton grown in China. I have an idea he was disappointed to find that that staple was not unknown

there. It was not at all improbable that he had had some notion of introducing it.

All this time I was working hard and doing my best to commend myself in the eyes of Mr. Sydenham and Mr. Cressey, and, though there was nothing brilliant about my progress, I believe I came to be known as a good worker, of the kind, I suppose, that Harold had designated machine-like; at any rate, I worked hard and steadily, and skipped my dinner when it was necessary with no great amount of fuss, and in other ways, that Harold said were "slavish," worked myself in my third year inside Mr. Cressey's picket fence, as his assistant.

I got on excellently with Mr. Cressey in my new position and grew to have a sort of liking for the queer little man, a part of which I suppose I must attribute to his newly formed habit of addressing me as "Mr. Bibbus," instead of "You!" Seeing less of Harold than formerly, and being shut up all day with Mr. Cressey in his four-poster bed, we formed an intimacy as strange as it was enduring, and I thought less of his years, and his absurd whiskers, and his habits of chewing snuff, now that I was received by him as an equal and had an opportunity of observing his more solid qualities.

One night when we had remained to finish up some work after all the rest had gone and I was locking up my desk, Mr. Cressey looked up from where he was lacing up his shoes in a corner, and called my name. He always wore slippers in the office because his feet hurt him, he said, but the clerks said it was so he could sneak up behind one unheard.

"If you would care to go home with me, Mr. Bibbus," he said, "I think I can promise you a good cup of tea. That is, if you have no other engagements."

I was greatly surprised at this invitation. Mr. Cressey had never been known to mention domestic affairs in the office and somehow I had never thought of him as living

anywhere. So close was he, indeed, about such matters that the most contradictory rumors about his housekeeping had been rife for years in the office without any one of them ever having been confirmed or denied. One asserted that he was a bachelor and lived at a club on Pine Street, and could be seen any night from after dinner to eleven o'clock reading the Government crop reports at a front window. Another dwelt somewhat circumstantially upon his being married to a tall woman with red poppies in her bonnet, who met him on pay nights a block away from the office, took his money away, and sent him home to mind the house while she went and did the marketing.

"I should be very glad indeed, Mr. Cressey," I answered, as soon as I got over my astonishment, "but hadn't I better go home and dress first?"

I had arrived a short time before at the dignity of a dress suit and allowed no opportunity to wear it to escape me.

"Not at all necessary," he returned, getting into his coat. "We are quiet folks and haven't been accustomed to dressing in the evening—of late years. Come along as you are."

He took me out the Manchester Road into a part of the town where I had never penetrated before, where streets of box-like cottages had been built (apparently by contract), through fields, where daisies and buttercups yet grew, and where the vacant lots, yet uninvaded by billboards, afforded pasturage for the family cow and scratching ground for the family chickens. Mr. Cressey turned in at the gate of one of these cottages (how he identified it I do not know, unless he counted them from the corner), and lugging out the great bunch of keys from his pocket, the sight of which I knew so well, whereof there was a tradition in the office that it contained a duplicate of every key in the innermost private pocket of every clerk there, selected his latchkey, and let us into a bright little hall, carpeted and papered in the brightest hues, the effect of whose daz-



zling cleanness led me furtively to wipe my feet on the door-mat, and again suffer internal misgivings at my venturing on this expedition without my patent leathers. But I had small time to indulge mental anguish upon this point, for there was a rustle of skirts at the top of the stairs and a head was thrust over the banister. I caught a glimpse of brown curls as I stepped hastily back against the wall.

"Dad?"

"Yes, honey!" cried Mr. Cressey, looking up. "Are you coming down, dear?"

"Of course I'm coming down," continued the voice, and I thought what a pleasant voice it was, "to scold you, you know. I didn't hear the horses, dad, and I was listening, too. I *do* believe you walked!"

Mr. Cressey laughed as he opened a door leading into a tiny little sitting-room, and motioned me to enter. "Well, I'll confess," he said, still addressing the brown curls above, "I did walk to-day, honey, just for a change, my dear; but *you* mustn't scold, for I don't see your maid anywhere, and I *do* believe you've discharged her!"

There was a merry laugh from above and the quick rustle of skirts descending the stairs. "The idea!" cried the pleasant voice. "I discharge my maid! And pray, sir, do you think I was brought up to do my own hair? I have merely let her go to visit a sick aunt—I think she said it was her aunt—and positively, I can't change my gown till she comes back. So let's hope the Prince doesn't call."

I had concealed myself as best I could behind a palm that stood in the window, and thought I could at least make my bow from there without exposing my boots.

She bounded in at the door, and the next moment I beheld Mr. Cressey enveloped in an embrace that left only the bald spot on the top of his head and one whisker visible. But that was enough of *him*, I wasn't looking at *him*. I *was staring*, in a condition bordering on imbecility, at the

graceful and bewildering figure of the girl who thus held him prisoner; at the profusion of curls that trailed over his worn collar; at the plump arms that encompassed his neck, and at the half-revealed profile that just hinted at dark fringed eyes and curving red lips.

"There!" she cried, releasing him. "How do you like that?" As if there could be two answers to such a question!

Mr. Cressey evidently liked it very well, for he drew her to him and kissed her again, and, still retaining her hand, turned toward my sheltering palm.

"Honey," he said, "I've brought one of my young men home to tea. Mr. Bibbus, my daughter Kate."

I got to my feet and bowed over my palm, but the girl, turning her head quickly as if startled, hesitated a moment and then stepped toward me and held out her hand, saying pleasantly, "It was good of papa to bring you, Mr. Bibbus."

I emerged from my retreat, murmuring, I think, that it was good of her to say so, and extended my hand to take hers. But she did not move toward me, and stood quite still with a welcoming smile upon her face and with her hand outstretched, so that I had, in some confusion, to walk quite up to her and place my hand in hers. And then I saw that she was blind.

## CHAPTER XXII

### MOSTLY SENTIMENTAL

**A**FTER I had become a regular weekly visitor at Mr. Cressey's, taking tea there every Thursday night and usually strolling in that direction every Sunday afternoon, the painful shock that came with the discovery of the terrible affliction of the old clerk's beautiful daughter was quickly dispelled before the sweetness and sunniness of her nature, and I soon found myself, except when out of her presence, as completely oblivious of the fact as, apparently, was she herself. If, at first, my conscience administered me sharp rebuke when I found myself charmed into forgetfulness by her winsomeness and chatter, I soon found it was needless. She neither desired nor would accept the pity that expressed itself in word or tone, and if such word were spoken the real pity was that one moment of her life had been made less happy by it. If I have passed over that first time I saw her with no word of the distress and heartsoreness the sudden revelation of her affliction brought to me, it is that I may speak of her only as I came to know her afterwards, without sorrow and without vain regrets.

I suppose she was under seventeen, and when her curls were down she admitted it; but once in a while, when we went for a Sunday walk, she would gather them up in a flat, round coil at the back of her head and say she was twenty. But when she understood that this gave me pain as making her my elder, she would hasten to assure me that it was just for the afternoon, and when we got back she would shake her curls down again and meekly ask if I would play dolls with her now?

I have given some hint of the pleasant fiction that existed between father and daughter regarding the supposititious pair behind which Mr. Cressey drove to and from the office in the city, and the maid that attended upon Kate (but who was usually visiting a sick relative), and it affords an agreeable example of the never-failing cheerfulness and playful humor that were always in evidence under that roof, as far at least, as father and daughter were concerned. A third inmate of the house was not always a partaker of this atmosphere (except to sniff at it), and this was Mr. Cressey's mother, who presided over the household. Presided, literally, at times, as if it were a board meeting, and she always had the casting vote. Mrs. Cressey was a large woman, massy rather than massive, and might answer the description of the newly created earth, as being without form, and void. She had a great, flabby face, seamed and weatherbeaten like a sailor's, and her skin had that dark blue cast that is usually observable on a chin that has felt the razor every day for a good many years. As Mrs. Cressey did not shave (to the best of my belief), I am inclined to think she was apoplectic. I would not mention the fact of her being bald, if baldness were necessary to any woman where "switches" can be procured. Besides which, Mrs. Cressey had plenty of her own hair on the sides and back of her head and left it there, and left her crown bald. In the face of perversity of this sort I have no compunction in relating a fact. Mrs. Cressey was not at first inclined to accept me as a regular Thursday night visitor, and chose to have an understanding on the subject, one night when I was taking tea there for the third or fourth time.

"John," said Mrs. Cressey, wiping the buttered toast from her mouth with her apron and pushing back her tea-cup with a determined movement.

"Well, Becky," responded her son, interrupting himself in a story he was telling me about how he and Mr. Syden-

ham used to take turns going out for the office coal, when there was no other help there, "what is it?"

"When you was his age you had to get up at five o'clock!"

"True, Becky," returned Mr. Cressey, cheerfully, taking no notice of my embarrassment, "those were hard days to be sure." And went on with his story.

"And you went to bed at seven!" again interrupted Mrs. Cressey, with grim and deadly perseverance.

"I needed lots of sleep in those days, didn't I, Becky?" again returned Mr. Cressey, nodding away at her with the greatest cheerfulness. And again he essayed to continue.

"You did it because you was made, that's why you did it!" said Mrs. Cressey, with emphasis. "You had *me* at your heels with a stick!"

Mr. Cressey laughed and shook his finger playfully across the table at his mother.

"Don't anybody tell me *your* memory is failing!" he said. "I dare say you laid it on, now and then, too."

"I laid it on when I thought you needed it," replied Mrs. Cressey, with some truculence, "which is more than some others done, I bet!"

This oblique line of attack made me very uncomfortable, and I had about decided that it would be wise to recall an engagement elsewhere, when Kate leaned over and whispered to me to say something about her grandmother's shawl. Mrs. Cressey wore over her shoulders, at all hours and on all occasions, a three-cornered shawl, somewhat worn along the folds and somewhat frayed as to the edges. To call attention to a lady's article of clothing exhibiting these unfavorable symptoms of age and wear, especially when that lady is in a frame of mind requiring something more than ordinary correctness of attitude on the part of those about her, did not, I confess, appear to me in the light of wisdom; but reflecting that Kate must have some good *reason* for recommending this diversion, I took advantage

of the silence which succeeded Mrs. Cressey's last deliverance and addressed her.

"If you will pardon me, Mrs. Cressey," I said, as delicately as I could, "that is a remarkable shawl you have there." If she had asked me, as I half suspected she would, in what way I considered it remarkable I should certainly have bolted.

But the effect of this artful inquiry fully justified Kate's knowledge in the premises. Mrs. Cressey, arrested in the very moment of delivering another shot, which I think, from the glare that had settled in her eye, would have been a finisher, closed her mouth upon it, the glare in her eye softened, melted, and vanished away, and her two fists, which she had doubled up and was supporting her chin on with her elbows planted on the table while she leveled her shot, relaxed themselves, slid down from their belligerent position and stealthily adjusted her shawl about her shoulders. I felt that I was saved.

"You are right, young man," responded Mrs. Cressey, settling it to her satisfaction across her ample bosom, and turning a considerably mollified face in my direction. "There's not many sich, and if my brother William was alive he would tell you so."

"Follow her up," whispered Kate, under cover of pouring my second cup of tea.

"Your brother William, ma'am?"

"Ah!" returned Mrs. Cressey, wagging her head. "There was a man!"

I was in some doubt whether I was to follow up her brother William or the shawl, but Mrs. Cressey relieved my apprehensions by continuing:

"There was a man as knowed what a shawl was! And why shouldn't he know?" she demanded, with sudden ferocity. "Deuce take it, wasn't he a sailor all his life? Here, feel of it!"

She took up a corner of the article in question and

reached it across to where I sat, and I ran my fingers over it gravely.

"It's cashmere," said Mrs. Cressey, fixing me with her glittering eye. I said I hadn't the least doubt of it.

"Mrs. Tribbles," said Mrs. Cressey, with her eye still upon me and speaking with a deadly kind of precision, "Mrs. Tribbles, what lived on the floor over us in New Orleans (her sink leaked, drat the woman!), said it wasn't!"

"Said — it — wasn't — cashmere!" I repeated, astonished. "Mrs. Tribbles said so?"

Mrs. Cressey gave a short, hard laugh. "She see my brother William give it to me when he came off his vi'age from Indy. She heerd him when he said, 'Becky, this here shawl is cashmere and wuth my year's pay. Keep it and don't never lend it.' *Don't never lend it,*" repeated Mrs. Cressey, with slow distinctness; "them was his words, and Mrs. Tribbles heard him say 'em. It was then," said Mrs. Cressey, throwing herself back in her chair, "that she said it wasn't cashmere!" Mrs. Cressey, with a meaning smile on her face, regarded me steadily as if she would leave it to my discernment to fathom Mrs. Tribbles' motive.

"But Lord forgive her," said Mrs. Cressey, sitting up again when I had nodded intelligently, to let her see the matter was quite transparent, "Lord forgive her, as I have done; she's been dead forty year."

It was so evident that Mrs. Cressey considered this taking off to be an act of providential justice, and that her calling upon the Deity to follow her example and forgive her, was an example of illuminating magnanimity, that I deemed it necessary only to assume a look of grave thoughtfulness, and shake my head in gentle deprecation of the rashness and folly of the dead.

Gratifying as this success was it had results less desirable, for nearly every evening now Mrs. Cressey bethought herself of her mother, her cousin—she that was Clarissa Swett—her father, a couple of sisters, and a maternal aunt, at

we ran *them* through, even as brother William. And after that the family silver and the family furniture received some weeks' attention.

"That, Mr. Bibbus," she would say, reaching across the table at tea and forcibly removing a spoon from the hand of her grand-daughter, "*that* is silver. Heft it. They don't make spoons like that nowadays, you bet! John cut his teeth on that. That spoon-holder belonged to my mother—John's grandmother; it's eighty year old; she was ninety when she died. This napkin ring was my cousin's—she that was Clarissa Swett and married Tom Dowling—it's sixty-five year old. Heft it. Them forks is only plated; *they* belonged to John's wife—her mother." Mrs. Cressey indicated her grand-daughter with a backhanded motion of her thumb. "Them plates is chaney. Pick one up and squint through it—well, mebbly you can't see through that one, it's got gravy on it; here, squint through this."

I squinted through it. "There!" cried Mrs. Cressey, with stern triumph. "I bet they ain't got no plates at Sydenham's you can squint through!"

I told her, no, indeed.

"He'd give the eyes out of his head for them plates, or them spoons, but he won't get 'em!" said Mrs. Cressey, bristling. "Not while I'm above ground! When I'm dead and gone," said Mrs. Cressey, with a sudden revulsion of feeling, and addressing her words pointedly at her son, "he can come and take the knobs off the doors if he wants to—and I've no doubt he will, and that my own son will abet him in it,—but not while I'm here, he won't. Why, deuce take the man," said Mrs. Cressey, with a sudden change from pathos to ferocity, "can't he wait till I'm dead?"

But on such blessed occasions as Mrs. Cressey went to sleep after tea with her feet on a chair and her cashmere shawl over her head, nothing could exceed our coziness and enjoyment. Mr. Cressey would smoke his pipe and I would



read in a low tone to Kate. We were very careful not to wake her grandmother, and Kate would draw her chair close to mine and sit with her eyes on the book as if she were following the words. And if her cheek touched my shoulder I was very careful not to move, but would sit in that position till I was numb. During the long winter evenings that now were upon us I read her all my favorites, and they became hers; and she crocheted a book-mark to keep the place when the evening's reading was over. I don't know that it was a great success as a book-mark—it had a tendency, I remember, to curl up in a wad and wouldn't lie out flat,—but *I* was satisfied with it, and its homely, red, worsted track marked faithfully week after week the progress of Little Nell, the fortunes of Oliver, and the sad, short journey of little Paul.

"You mustn't mind if I cry, you know," said Kate, tremulously, intercepting (with the book-mark) a big tear that was slowly, stealing down her cheek the night the schoolmaster and his little friend parted company. "Don't mind me; why don't you go on?" And because she couldn't see my own cheeks, and because I was a boy, and because boys don't cry over books, why, I went on.

If Mrs. Cressey's respiratory performance held out promise of long continuation, we would perhaps adjourn the reading early to enable Mr. Cressey to beat me three games of checkers. Kate would sit by and hold the pieces and hand them to us when a man was to be crowned. And because this gave her pleasure, and perhaps because her father felt the selfishness of his indulgence under the circumstances, we crowned, legitimately and otherwise, a great many men, so that the board presented at times the novel spectacle of a contest where all the participants were royal, and the kings fought out the battles without their subjects' aid; a plan which it is much to be deplored can not be adopted upon the checkerboard of the world.

But perhaps the greatest (and necessarily the most selfish)

joy for me, lay in the Sunday afternoon walks. Mrs. Cressey's feet being usually in a swollen state we left her behind, and with Kate's hand touching my arm ever so lightly, and her father (in his Sunday cuffs that swallowed his hands completely and made him look like an armless veteran) walking ahead, and walking into everything in consequence of having his face continually turned toward us while he explained to me (without my having the slightest idea what he was talking about) the age, history, and utility of every building we passed, we strolled miles on pleasant sunny days, usually toward the country, where I had often (or thought I had) to help Kate across muddy places in the road that weren't half muddy enough or deep enough to suit me, to whom a quicksand would have been welcome; and if I could have been swallowed up in one while handing her across to her agonized father, stretching out his arms from the firm ground beyond, and saying with my last gasp, "Take her, and if convenient let her first-born be named after me," I would have been just as well satisfied. But, alas! life's quicksands lie not in country roads.

Perhaps in the evening we went to service at a tiny little chapel in the next street, where a very young minister, with a terrifically loud voice, used to shout at the top of it to a congregation of about eight old ladies and some half-dozen scared children; but we didn't mind him in the least, and when the congregation rose to sing (except one old lady, who used regularly to be carried out in a fit before the doxology), and Kate's little gloved hand touched mine as we held the hymn-book between us, I was no more aware of the bare little chapel or the waving arms of the minister beating time than if they had never encountered my vision.

I have not thought it necessary to impeach the reader's intelligence by recording, as a bald fact, the statement that I was in love with Kate. I might deem it essential to describe the depth and enduring character of that love, were

I not aware of the impossible nature of that task, and of the hopelessness of bringing anyone to appreciate the suffering I underwent in connection with it. I felt that I was formed both to suffer and to love beyond my years, and was enduring, at eighteen, the full measure of human experience. One consolation that came to me was that it would certainly turn my hair gray and give me the appearance as well as the sorrows of age, which would be some compensation.

I could not of course long conceal from Harold the fact of my frequent visits to the old clerk's house, and they roused from the first his lively curiosity.

"What the dickens do you do there?" he persisted for the twentieth time, when he beheld me arraying myself one night for my customary call. "Are you and old Cressey conspiring to bull the market, or do you help him count his money? The old codger must have a barrel of it, somewhere; why, look what he must have saved in hats alone; is he going to leave it to you, Sum?"

But I only laughed and put him off, and while I had to endure a good deal of quizzing from him he never approached the truth, and I believe he finally got the idea somehow that I was giving Mr. Cressey lessons in Latin in exchange for lessons on the flute, though why in the world he should suspect that Mr. Cressey could play the flute or that I wanted to, I can not tell. But when this intimacy finally leaked out at the office, as it was bound to do, of course, I found it much harder to evade the inquiries that were launched at me from all sides. Was it true about the woman with the red poppies in her bonnet? Was it a fact that Mr. Cressey changed his boarding-place once a week so people wouldn't get acquainted with him and ask him for a match? What did he do with all his money? Where did he live? Did he have another suit of clothes? Had he offered me anything to drink, *and was* I sure he hadn't put a powder in it, and did I

know of any reason why he should wish to get me out of the way? I found, after some floundering, that the best way to keep my secret was to affect a mystery of the matter, look thoughtful when questioned, smile enigmatically, hint that I *could* tell things, and preserve generally the chafing silence of a man bound by oath. This artful policy did indeed secure me, after a time, immunity from unwelcome pesterings, but it set afloat some new and most extraordinary stories of Mr. Cressey's private life for which, much to my confusion, I found myself the accepted sponsor. Thus, it shortly came to my ears, and on the strength, it would seem, of my own testimony, that Mr. Cressey lived in almost Oriental splendor, in sumptuous apartments where strange drinks were served and foreign cookery came up on silver plate; that the little clerk who bent over a ledger all day in Mr. Sydenham's office underwent a metamorphosis after four o'clock, and, dressed in flowered Eastern robes with a tasseled cap on his head, abandoned himself to voluptuous enjoyment, squandering in rich feasts and strange freaks of sensuality the savings of a lifetime; that the few favored ones whom he admitted to these nocturnal orgies found themselves the recipients of a hospitality as magnificent as that dispensed by Prince Florizel or Monte Cristo, and that not alone were their bodily appetites appeased with every edible cookery could devise, wine could wash down, or tobacco help digest, but that they were regaled as well with the delights of music, the exhalation of rare flowers, and the pleasure of easeful conversation. No talk of business was ever permitted; in particular any one using the word "cotton" was summarily ejected. After a night spent in these Sybaritic pleasures, it was represented that Mr. Cressey, in the cold gray of dawn, made applications of cold towels to his fevered head, resumed his threadbare, commercial habiliments, and sought his stool at the office, there to contend with lowly figures, sneezes, and headache through another day. I suppose it was the

Arabian Nights flavor about this supposed double life of Mr. Cressey's that lent the theory of it such ready acceptance, and kept alive a keen emulation in the breasts of the junior clerks, each to elaborate it with further circumstantial details; howbeit, it furnished them a theme for speculation which took precedence even of prize-fights for many a week and day.

At first I experienced some uneasiness lest these stories should reach Mr. Cressey's ears and affect my standing with him; but if they did he never betrayed the knowledge to me, and thereafter I was able to appreciate something of the humor and something of the pathos that was afforded in the contrast between the romances current in the office and the reality of the little cottage, the blind girl, the Thursday-evening tea, the cashmere shawl, the stolen readings, the pipe, and the checkerboard.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### I GO UPON A VISIT

**I**T must not be supposed that I had had no communication with my parents during this time. While I can not say that the correspondence between us had been at all regular, I had early apprised them of my presence in St. Louis, and thereafter we exchanged letters upon occasions of such importance as seemed to warrant that expenditure of effort (which in my father's case usually meant whenever he entered upon a new occupation). I had found it necessary to offer them little explanation of my motives for leaving Mr. Walpole's roof. The bursting of the Princep bubble and the flight of Mrs. Walpole supplied the obvious reasons, and the secret of the will remained unguessed. Indeed, my action received my father's warmest commendations, and he quoted some lines about casting the bantling on the rocks and suckling him with the she-wolf's teat, which he made, by a happy turn, to convey a pleasing significance for me as bearing directly upon the inevitable success of such bantling later on in the cotton business.

But now, when I found myself getting on so well, I determined to pay them a visit. I had no difficulty in obtaining the required leave from Mr. Sydenham, who bade me go and take my own time. Mr. Cressey grumbled a little when I told him, and though I knew he had no real objection to my going, gradually worked himself up from this point during the day, through a series of growls, sniffs, snorts, slamming of books, violent jerking about of papers, and more or less hazardous pirouetting through the a

between his desk and mine on one leg of his stool, to the point of asking me at last if I thought I owned the business; and if I knew how many years he had been there; and if I thought he was a slave; and if I thought he was going to get down and let me wipe my feet on him; and a great many more unpleasant questions, equally relevant and equally biting. But before night his spleen had worked off and he shook hands with me, hoped I would enjoy myself, desired that his compliments might be conveyed to my father and mother, and (what was more to the purpose, and what I had been waiting for) invited me home to tea, though it was only Monday night.

As my plans contemplated an early start on the morrow, I felt that this occasion promised well for some advancement of my suit with Kate, which had rather languished of late, not because I had abated any of my burning ardor, but because she had been so much more interested in *Nicholas Nickleby*. Unfortunately, Mrs. Cressey was in a particularly wakeful and reminiscent condition after tea, and every time I attempted to turn the conversation to the dangers of life and limb in the mining towns of the Ozarks, and hint at the frequency with which travelers in those regions disappeared and never turned up again alive, this inconsiderate and ill-conditioned woman would bethink herself of the time her brother William was shipwrecked on some miserable island somewhere, and lived on turtle's eggs for three months. She didn't just recall the name of the ship, though she endeavored to for three-quarters of an hour while we politely suggested different names to assist her memory; but she concluded the narrative to her own satisfaction by saying that her brother William could easily supply these details if he were alive. I do not think my patience was ever subjected to a severer trial than during the time I sat there, with the hour growing steadily later, keeping up a well-feigned show of interest and offering Mrs. Cressey the name of every bird I ever heard of (she

had a shadowy idea that it *was* the name of a bird), while she steadily and with ever-growing conviction rejected Swan, Eagle, Albatross, Pigeon, Pelican, and Peacock. At last, when even Mr. Cressey had yawned once or twice and the clock had struck ten with peculiar distinctness, Mrs. Cressey bade me never mind, and not to be disappointed as she would try to think of it herself before I came again, and took her shoes off to rub her feet, which I knew was a sign that she was going to take a nap.

"Kate," I whispered, losing no time, "what if anything should happen to me; what if I shouldn't come back? Should you care?"

"Why, how you talk!" said Kate, reproachfully. "Of course I'd care. Who'd finish *Nicholas Nickleby* for me, I'd like to know!"

For once I strongly deprecated that hero in my heart.

"But, Kate," I persisted with anguish, but with an attentive ear to Mrs. Cressey's breathing, "don't you know I love you?"

"Why, of course I do, you foolish boy," said Kate, with her silvery laugh. "Didn't you tell me so ever and ever so long ago and twice a week ever since?"

"Yes, but you never told me, you know," I returned, boldly.

Kate's long lashes drooped and a lovely smile deepened the dimples in her cheeks as she spread the fingers of both hands over her face and pretended to peep at me through them—oh, the pity of it!

"The idea! How can I say such a thing to a man—I—never—saw!"

Somehow the words grated, and I felt a shock go over me that even her bright laugh could not stay, and then as she took her hands from her face and turned it, still dimpled with fun, toward me, the reaction came upon her, too.

She started up with a plaintive little cry and stretched out



her arms toward her father, and then sank in a heap into her chair, with her face in her hands, sobbing lowly.

"Eh!" cried Mr. Cressey, starting from his doze and looking round. "Why, honey, what is it, child?"

He was bending over her in a moment, gently taking her hands from her face and laying his own wrinkled one against her wet cheek. "What is the matter, honey girl?"

"Oh, dad!" she cried, clinging to him, "your girl forgot!" But with her face buried on his shoulder she quickly regained herself. "It's my fault, dear dad; I'm rightly punished," she said, shaking the tears from her cheeks and laughing again, but with a little catch in her voice. "I only meant to tease Sumner. There, dad, I'm all right now, and see, I've cried all over your collar!"

She patted her father's face and smiled up into it; and, though an occasional, hysterical little sob shook her from time to time, she was her own bright self again. Her father, with a troubled shake of his head, went softly back to his seat.

At which juncture Mrs. Cressey suddenly awoke and, sitting up in her chair, cried out in a voice of triumph:

"It was the *Flying Fish*!"

We all looked at her in amazement, and I suppose our first thought was that she was in a nightmare.

"What was, Becky?" asked Mr. Cressey, soothingly.

"The name of my brother William's ship he was wrecked in," said the old lady, looking triumphantly around. "I knowed it was the name of some bird!"

It being pretty clear to me, after this final blow, that my opportunity was gone for that night, I rose to take my leave. But I think Kate must have appreciated my disappointment and felt some pity for me, for when Mr. Cressey shook hands with me and repeated his compliments to my father, she gave me her cheek to kiss and then charged me to remember that it was for my mother. I saw her, as I looked back from the gate, standing in the doorway with

her hand on her father's shoulder, and the pitiful words rang again in my ears, "Oh, dad, your girl forgot!"

The town of Pitmouth lay on the side of a rocky hill. Or perhaps that is too restful an expression to apply to its adventurous climb up the scarred and precipitous incline; rather it clung there, its toes gripping the soil, and refused to be thrust or rolled down, evidently harboring designs on the summit. The side of the hill—which, with its heavy growth of scrubby, undersized trees, was not unlike the forbidding forehead of some low-browed Cyclops, with coarse, untrained hair growing downward on it—showed a long, straight gash right up its face, where the main street had hewed its way through the rock and flint, and now lay glaring in the sun, covered with the thick, red dust from the clayey soil, as if it were still bleeding from the cut. Why the pioneers of the town should have chosen to launch it headforemost against the hill in this way, like a battering-ram, instead of essaying a less formidable angle, presents a problem for which I can suggest no answer, except on the general hypothesis of the western preference for going straight ahead and overcoming, and bearing down all obstacles whatever, and a distrust of any sort of compromising with difficulties, as savoring of kid gloves, effeminacy, and New England. For similar reasons, perhaps, the stumps of several trees had been left standing where the sidewalk ran, and the same bold policy had been pursued with respect to the carcass of a dead dog, which I encountered a short distance up the street, in undisturbed possession of the gutter; the assumption being that the community's perpetual state of hustle, and determination to reach the top of that hill, left it no time to clear up behind it as it went, certainly none to fool away on meretricious adornment.

I looked about me with much interest as I made my way along the main street. The buildings were mostly of wood

and were built up on piles, some showing a considerable length of log, others requiring only a little aid, as the uneven nature of the ground made necessary; making them severally appear either to be standing a-tiptoe, or squatting down, to reach the common level of the sidewalk, which held its way (itself on stilts), straight as a die, and, as already hinted, over whatever obstruction, toward the goal whither all else tended, at the summit of the hill.

The street was given over wholly to business. On one corner my attention was arrested by the "Boston Store," while immediately opposite was the "New York Store," both doing a brisk business in pipe-smoking. Further up another enterprising merchant, unwilling to be outdone, and finding these attractive titles preëmpted by his competitors, boldly advertised the "Paris Emporium"—and sold hardware. The proprietor of the Boston Store, more energetic than his neighbors, had shaken off the slothful ease of his smooth-worn chair, tilted against the wall in the sunshine, and was hopefully engaged, as I passed by, in luring a great fat sow (the mother of a family) up to the edge of the sidewalk with the object, as I gathered from the excited comment of the onlookers, of snapping a split stick (prepared with great labor) on her ear or tail. His efforts were crowned with success as I reached the corner above, and the squeals of the pig and the uproarious delight of the spectators were audible as far up the street as Budlong's (Ales, Wines, Liquors, and Cigars), which immediately contributed its quota of absorbed onlookers. The reason, I judge, that this popular diversion did not turn out additional numbers from the other stores and offices on the street, was that all the inmates of these places were already outside, tilted up against the wall in their chairs, in unbroken rows on both sides of the street and the whole length of the street. The whole male population of the town, apparently, was on the sidewalk that afternoon. Nor was the day at all exceptional, for at no time during my stay there

did I see the street, or at least the sunny side of it, thinned appreciably. In the morning, before the sun was high enough to favor both sides, the dwellers on the shady side would move across into its warmth; and in the late afternoon, when its beams smiled on their side only, the merchants over the way would go over in a body, taking their chairs with them, and sit out the remaining sunlight with their visitors of the morning. Nor did they permit the ordinary demands of their business to disturb their repose. I have heard the proprietor of the grocery store, visiting the druggist opposite, call across the street to a customer who had entered his store, and ask him what he wanted.

"Nothin' but a can o' beans, Bill," responded the would-be purchaser, from the doorway.

"All right; yo' know where to find 'em."

The customer waved his hand, implying familiarity with the whereabouts of the goods in question, and a moment later reappeared with the merchandise in his hand. He held it up mutely, as he passed up the street, and the proprietor nodded, made a note of the transaction with the stub of a pencil on the back of a dirty letter he took from his pocket, and resumed his conversation with the druggist and the other visitors.

Glancing about for someone to make inquiry of as to where I might find my father's place of business, my eye lighted on the postmaster seated (in his shirt-sleeves) in front of the post-office, and decided to seek my information of him. He was a youngish fellow, with a great, sheepish face, and with rather more pretense to style in his dress than was apparent in that of most of the citizens I had seen; as was evidenced by a good deal of collar with a polka-dot necktie, striped, tight-fitting trousers, and tooth-pick shoes.

He returned my salutation politely, and hospitably motioned for me to occupy an empty chair on the other side of the doorway. I don't know how it came to be vacant,

unless its late occupant had gone home ill. He couldn't have been gone long, however, as it was still quite warm.

"Stranger in town?" he asked, as I took the chair.

I told him yes, that I had just come in on the train.

"Goin' to stay long?" he pursued, and it struck me that he was likely to turn out questioner, at this rate, instead of me.

I told him I should probably stay a couple of weeks or more; that I had come to visit my folks and could he tell me wh——

"From St. Looley, I reckon," he went on, eying my clothes with approval, and cutting my inquiry short.

I gave it up for the present and told him, yes; I was from St. Louis.

"Them pants wuz made in St. Looley," he said, indicating his own. "What do yo' think of 'em?" He held out his leg and contemplated the effect with complacency.

He was very much pleased when I hinted, politely, that it was very easily seen that the articles in question had come from the best makers.

"But I didn't go to St. Looley for 'em," he continued, giving me a slow wink, and pausing to see how I received that announcement.

I raised my eyebrows incredulously.

"Got 'em ouden a catalogue," he exclaimed, triumphantly, when he was near to bursting, from holding in until he could repeat the wink four several times, prolonging it each time till his eye fairly watered. "Took my own measure an' had 'em come by *ex-press*!"

It being pretty plain that the postmaster attached a Machiavellian cunning to this procedure, I endeavored to express in my face the wonder and admiration I did not trust myself to attempt to convey by words.

"Yes, siree!" went on the postmaster, accepting this facial achievement with equanimity. "Same with them shoes; they came from Chicago. Them sleeve-buttons, too—

Memphis; thet watch charm—Kansas City; all outen catalogues!”

He exhibited each of these articles to me in turn, dwelling with especial fondness on the watch charm, which was the representation of the head of a fox holding a huge glass marble in its mouth, after the well-known manner of foxes; the head executed in white plaster and of about the size of a well-developed boy's fist.

“I git a pile of catalogues,” he continued, enthusiastically; “they come in the mail to people thet don't never call for 'em, and I take 'em. Lord! I bet I got fifty of 'em, with picters all drawed in purty colors, and they didn't cost me a cent!”

This valuable perquisite of the postmaster's office appealed so strongly to him that he was fain, at this point, to double himself up in his chair in an ecstasy of enjoyment, smite his thighs, and roar with laughter.

“Why,” said he, after experiencing a slow recovery, during which I had seriously considered going on and leaving him to come out of it at his leisure, “why, 'tain't my fault thet folks don't come an' git 'em, or thet they come addressed to people when there ain't no sich people yere. They can't make *me* pay for 'em; *I* didn't order 'em sent! But say, mister, wouldn't they be sore if they knowed I wuz gittin' 'em all fer nothin'!”

As his imagination pictured the discomfiture of the catalogue publishers, in the event of this knowledge coming to them, he was seized with a second fit of thunderous mirth, when the roar of his bull voice seemed to shake the crazy building against which he leaned.

“Why,” said he, coming out of this second fit in a visibly weakened state, “why, mister, if yo' believe me I even got two ov one kind, onct!” and went into a third.

The postmaster was so long coming out of this one that I thought it a good opportunity to propound my own inquiries.

"Do you know a Mr. Bibbus here?" I asked. "And can you tell me where to find him?"

"Kunnel Bibbus?" replied the postmaster. "Why, sure; ev'rybody knows the Kunnel. Yo' go right down the street thar——"

"I'm afraid I don't mean the Colonel," I interrupted. "It's Mr. Bermondsey Bibbus I'm looking for."

The postmaster wagged his head affirmatively. "Egg-zactly," he said, "thet's the one *I* mean; Kunnel Bibbus, editor ov the *Clarion*. Yo' go right down the street thar to the drug-store and his offis is upstairs."

This information was certainly a surprise to me, a double surprise in fact. It was surprising enough to learn that my father was the editor of a newspaper, but it was a still greater surprise to learn that he was a Colonel. But I did not know, then, that every editor of a newspaper in Missouri is a Colonel.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### JOURNALISTIC INTELLIGENCE

**B**EFORE climbing the rickety stairs that led to the regions above the drug-store, pointed out by my friend the postmaster, I stepped across the street and cast my eyes up at the windows in order to form, if possible, some preliminary idea of the character and appearance of my father's editorial quarters, before invading them. Allowing for the view of the interior being rather restricted by the extreme smallness and griminess of the window panes, my inspection was still further hindered by the presence, at the middle window, which was open, of the head, shoulders, and bared inky arms of a man with a smeared face and a tousled head of hair, who was leaning out with his elbows on the sill, smoking a cob-pipe, and frequently spitting, in a thoughtful manner, into the street below.

Observing me looking up at him with some appearance of interest, the man nodded his tousled head to me, and at the same time removed his pipe from his mouth to allow full play to an expansive grin, which first spread over his features and then obliterated them; his eyes and nose apparently retiring upward into his hair, and his mouth and chin downward into the neck of his greasy calico shirt. Upon my acknowledging these friendly attentions with an answering smile, the man in the window, after directing a cautious look over his shoulder into the room, leaned a little farther out, and screwing his face up into an expression denoting the strictest confidence, seemed to impart the reason for his risibility, and invite my own, by



jerking his thumb over his shoulder into the room in the direction he had glanced a moment before, nodding his head a great many times, shutting one eye and grinding his fist in the palm of his hand, as if he were pulverizing some object into particularly small bits. After which he again extinguished his facial lineaments in a void of grin.

This remarkable pantomime being wholly unintelligible to me, I gazed at the man in the window with considerable astonishment, seeing which (after another glance over his shoulder) he beckoned to me to come under the window, when, laying his pipe down on the sill, he put his two hands to his mouth and whispered down to me:

"He's after 'em ag'in!"

"After whom?" I whispered, mystified.

The man above jerked his thumb up the street toward the summit of the hill. "The Bald Knob receivers, *in* course! He's gin 'em a week's rest now, but he couldn't hold in no longer! I ben lookin' fer it, but I did think I'd get her through to-day safe, spesh'ly when I hed the forms all locked an' wuz a-shovin' of 'em in the press!" Once more the humor of the situation, combined with the necessity of indulging it noiselessly, was near to overcoming the man in the window, but this ticklish crisis once more safely passed he was again able to resume.

"He wuz a-pacin' up an' down the floor with his han's behind him, or sometimes a-shovin' of 'em in his pockets, or a-rubbin' of his head,—you know the Kunnel's way,"—I nodded quickly, beginning to see what the man in the window was driving at,—“an’ at last he sez, ‘Mat,’ he sez, ‘is the inside locked?’ ‘Tight,’ sez I, ‘an’ the outside, too.’ Which the outside wasn’t,” explained the man in the window, confidentially, “but I hed to sidetrack him somehow ef I could.” I nodded. “The Kunnel he kep’ on a-pacin’ up an’ down,” resumed the man in the window, satisfying himself from time to time that no one was approaching

from within, "an' at last he sez, 'Mat,' he sez, 'ain't yo' got no plate yo' kin kill nowhar?' 'Nary inch,' sez I, workin' away like smoke to git the forms in the press afore he stopped me. But it warn't no use, he couldn' hold in! 'Mat,' sez he, after a-pacin' up an' down a couple times more an' a-smashin' of the table with his fist ev'ry time he passed, 'Mat,' he sez, 'open up the inside ag'in an' make me room fer a galley o' double leads somewhar'. With thet he set hisself down and begins to write like mad. 'But,' sez I, 'Kunnel, ev'rything inside is alive; thar's the Noo York store ad—' 'Kill it then,' sez the Kunnel, ca'm ez you please. 'Kill the Noo York store ad!' sez I. 'Why, Kunnel, kill thet an' you kill two dollars an' six bits.' 'All right,' he sez, thout lookin' up, 'kill it; thar ain't no cheap comershellism goin' ter dictate the policy o' this paper when the commun'ty is bein' *exploited* by a gang o' pirates, ef they air from Bos'on,' he sez, an' goes on writin' ag'in like smoke! He's a-writin' now," continued the man in the window, once more glancing back into the room and again extending his features with a broadening grin, "which means I got ter wait an' mos' likely kick her off after dark, but I don't keer; I'll back the Kunnel ag'in all Bos'on to chaw 'em up with the ch'icest English thet air slung this side the Mississip', an' it's a pleasher, a shore pleasher to kick her off fer the Kunnel at enny hour!"

"I believe I'll come up and see him," I ventured, as the man in the window concluded this handsome eulogy of my father's literary abilities.

"Wull," said he, taking another look into the room and then casting his eye with some anxiety at the sun, which was getting low down in the west, "I'd take it kindly ef yo' *would* kinder happen in keerless like; the case of long primer is low."

Nodding acceptance of this delicate commission, I ran quickly up the stairs. A battered deal door with a dirty glass panel bearing the scratched and faded legend,

"Clarion Office," opened on the narrow landing above, and boldly pushing my way in, I found myself in the room with my new acquaintance, at least with that portion of him that was not out the window, he having now engaged in conversation with a friend a block or two down the street.

The interior of this room bore, in its general appearance, a very close resemblance to the man in the window; being very inky, very greasy, and very much tousled up, and there could not be the smallest question about the one belonging to the other. A couple of printer's cases occupied the space before the windows, and they were inky, and greasy, and notched, and battered, and weak-legged; indeed everything in the room was in such an agreeable state of harmony with every other thing, and with the man in the window, that they were all in exactly the same condition of inkiness, greasiness, and tousledupedness, so that no one thing could claim to be any newer, any cleaner, or any less an accessory of the trade than any other visible thing. Even the ceiling was ink-spattered. Against the wall (and in a suspicious attitude of being partly supported by it) stood the press, and a worn spot in the floor in front of it seemed to indicate the place where the man in the window stood, on one foot, while he "kicked her off."

A table littered up with papers, pasteboard boxes, pots of paste, a dish of fly poison, stray wood-cuts, and odds and ends of every description, making a load under which the table (never robust) seemed momentarily on the point of giving up and sitting down in its corner; a cracked imposing-stone, wet and sloppy, and covered with columns, and half-columns, and quarter columns of type, tied round with string; some broken shelving on the wall bearing its accumulated load of dusty, fly-specked envelope boxes, boxes of bill-stickers of every color, boxes of writing-paper of every size, all of which were presumably of the stock in trade; a cracked mirror over a cracked sink; a greasy towel; a pic-

ture of Horace Greeley; a calendar; a stove, and four spittoons completed the accessories of the room.

In the rear a partition of unpainted and unmatched boards had been run up half-way to the ceiling, forming a space apparently about the size of my old sleeping closet back of the bookshop at home, and through the open door of this enclosure (which bore a placard marked "Private") I could just see the top of a head which could be the top of no other head in all the wide world—than which there was no top shinier and smoother to any head more towering and dome-like—than my father's!

I stepped through the door and stood at his side before he looked up. He was writing at a flat desk and behind a rampart of folded newspapers, piled high in front of him, and it was not until I stepped from behind these and was at his elbow, that he raised his head. He looked at me a moment through his black-rimmed eye-glasses (which were not at all awe-inspiring) with some severity, and then, as the smile which I tried vainly to repress got beyond my control and destroyed the assumed expression I had endeavored to clothe my features with, I saw his own give way before the sudden light of recognition.

"Good God!" he cried, as he struggled to disengage his knees from under the desk and rise to his feet, an effort that threatened to wreck it unless speedily accomplished. "Sumner, my boy—one word, there's been no panic in the cotton market?"

I quickly assured him that there was no trouble of that sort and he seized me by the shoulders and embraced me warmly. I do not think anything could have surpassed his delight at seeing me, unless it was his repeatedly expressed astonishment at the remarkable fact of our meeting in Missouri.

"To think," he exclaimed, holding me off at arm's length and contemplating my face with beaming satisfaction, "to think of you walking in on me here in Missouri—in Mis-

souri!" My father dwelt upon this singularity as if it carried a far greater weight of significance than if our meeting had occurred in Kansas, or Nebraska.

It was some time before he could moderate his joy at seeing me, so far as to permit of any more rational expression of it than alternately pushing me into a chair by the shoulders, in a fervor of hospitality, and pulling me out again in a fervor of affection, to give me another hug, while repeating for the twentieth time that it didn't seem possible, and that he should have known me anywhere, and what a curious thing it was, to be sure, that we should meet in Missouri! But at last he let me stay in my chair, and pulled his own up close in front of me, and contented himself with resting a palm on each of my knees and gazing into my face with his delight fairly bubbling out of his own,—which opportunity I hastened to seize to ask about my mother.

"Ah!" said my father, beaming on me. "What a woman that is! (She's remarkable well.) What a mind! Sumner, your mother has the character, the ability, and the indomitability of a—er—Roman matron. She might be the mother of the Gracchi. But come, you will be impatient to see her. Just wait a moment while I finish what I was writing here, and we'll be off. You might step to the door and call Mat here, if you will."

Giving me a pat on each knee, he made a plunge at his desk, while I called into the room my acquaintance of the window, who came shuffling in, bestowed a wink of confidential understanding on me, and stood still to receive my father's commands.

"There," said my father, after writing away busily for a few minutes, and handing him the written sheets, "as soon as you set that up, you can go to press. Don't forget the double-leads."

Mat shook his head dubiously as he took the copy. "It's all right to say double-leads, Kunnel," he said, disconso-

lately, "but w'en yo' air eatin' up space at the rate of fo' dollahs——"

"There you go again," interrupted my father, turning on him truculently. "Must we go all over that ground again every time I encroach on your miserable advertising? Shortsighted as ever, Mat! Aren't you a stockholder in the Bald Knob?"

"Shorely, shorely," admitted Mat, creasing the sheets with his thumb, and regarding the greasy smear produced by this means with the greatest surprise and trying to wipe it off with his elbow.

"And isn't nearly every other man in this community a stockholder?" continued my father, sternly. "And hasn't your money and theirs, your hard-got earnings, been cunningly tied up in it these three years by the scheming manipulations of the—er—the leeches, the blood-sucking leeches, who were placed in charge of its affairs for the purpose of getting it out for you and who promised a dividend in a twelve-month?"

"Shorely, shorely," repeated Mat, with a conciliatory air and backing toward the door.

"Where is that dividend?" demanded my father, pointing his finger at the abashed Mat, who shook his head hastily, disclaiming all knowledge of it. "Ah! where is it? You may well ask where it is. But don't ask me. Ask the gentlemen from Boston who are engaged in liquidating—ha! ha!—liquidating the affairs of the Company; doubtless they will tell you; oh, doubtless! To be sure," continued my father, with bitter irony, "they have not seen fit to tell the *Clarion*, which has been asking that same question pretty persistently ever since I came to preside over its editorial functions, but no doubt they will be delighted to tell you. Oh, no doubt. Ask them, but don't, I beg of you, ask me!"

The now thoroughly crushed Mat, bearing the onus of having asked this unfortunate question, though innocent of it, dejectedly withdrew, after inking his nose pretty thor-

oughly by wiping that feature several times apologetically with the back of his hand in a fruitless endeavor to placate my father, and we soon heard the penitent clicking of the type in his stick.

"That's a sample," said my father, turning to me, "of what I have to contend against in the fight I am waging with organized corruption, corporate greed, and—er—legalized robbery. The very individuals whose cause I have espoused, whose rights I am defending, and for whom I am, as I may say, vicariously expending my intellectual powers, are the first to blench when their withers are—er—however momentarily, wrung. Ha! Let us go home."

I could not help noticing, when we got on the street, the great deference paid to my father by everyone we met. He was invariably saluted by his title of Colonel and seemed, I thought, rather pleased with it. Certainly he walked with his shoulders well thrown back, his head erect, and his elbows at his sides; certainly, too, there was a greater expanse of shirt bosom, a more imposing spread of collar, and a more generous width of hat-brim noticeable in his make-up than in the old bookshop days.

We found my mother in the kitchen preparing supper, and (God bless her!) some momentary confusion of her ideas, occasioned by my unexpected appearance in so much more of a grown-up state than she had last seen me, and by my much-heralded connection with the cotton market and the house of Sydenham, made her first welcome something less maternal than ceremonious.

"Let me see," said my mother, with one hand on my shoulder and looking thoughtfully at my father, "we could sleep in the wood-shed, Bermondsey, and——"

"What are you talking about," I cried, giving her a half-provoked hug. "I shall sleep on that couch under the mantle or go back to St. Louis this very night."

"My dear," returned my mother, with dignity, "do you suppose that because we live in an atmosphere of Lead and

Zinc, we don't know what is due on an occasion like this? However limited the means at our disposal, they shall be employed to their utmost advantage to meet the requirements of your comfort while under this roof. If you have come at a time when the silk-padded bed-spread is on the line and the hair-mattress sent away to be cleaned, that is your fault for not letting us know you were coming."

But during supper her official demeanor began gradually to wear away, and from sitting very upright in her chair and being very ceremonious with her tea-cup, she soon began to loll back in a more comfortable attitude, and crumb her bread on the cloth and balance her spoon on her finger, as of old; and, before the meal was over, had cleared a space on the table for her arms, and we might have been once more, for comfort, homelikeness, and conversational ease, sitting round the tea-table in the old parlor back of the bookshop.

"But you haven't told me," said I, addressing my father when these happy results were attained, "how you come to be editing this newspaper."

My father made a comfortable noise in his throat as he leaned back and brushed the crumbs from his shirt bosom.

"Ha! No. Well, I am editing the *Clarion* because—well, because the former editor—er—ran away and left it on my hands."

"And it was the consensus of opinion here, I believe," struck in my mother, as I turned a mystified face toward her, "that it could not have been left in better hands."

My father acknowledged this compliment with a wave of his hand.

"Possibly so, possibly so; as to that I—er—can not take it upon myself to say. Thank you, my love, I am aware of your partiality."

But my mother would not have it so. "Bermondsey," she said firmly, "I can not permit, even among ourselves or from you, any allusion to your editorial work in behalf of this



community, that does not do full justice to the value of that work, to pass unchallenged. I can not permit Sumner to carry away with him, to the metropolis, an inadequate conception of his father's standing in the town of his adoption, adduced from that father's too modest estimate of his own achievements. I can not permit it."

My father waved his hand again and said, "Tut, tut!" to which my mother again replied with undiminished firmness, "Bermondsey, I can not permit it!" To which my father shook his head and seemed to submit under protest.

"The circumstances which placed your father in control of the *Clarion*," continued my mother, having thus carried the day, "were somewhat peculiar. You are aware that at the time of the Bald Knob failure your father was in very close touch with the affairs of the Company and with Mr. Princep. And I suspected that man," said my mother, interrupting herself and shaking her finger at my father, "from the moment that I discovered that he wore a woman's-size shoe! Whatever suspicions may have been roused in other minds at a later date, that's when *I* first suspected him."

"He had very sound economic views," murmured my father, regretfully; "his ideas on the subject of fiat money——"

"Sound or unsound," interrupted my mother, with asperity, "any man who wears woman's shoes is morally deficient!"

My father wisely declining to take further issue with her on this point, my mother looked steadily at me for a few moments to see if *I* cared to controvert her. I shook my head quickly and she resumed with quiet triumph:

"Your father's information, as I was saying, in regard to the affairs of the wrecked Company was everywhere recognized as being exceptional. His position as Mr. Princep's confidential adviser had given him opportunities of gaining an insight into its inner workings such as no one else enjoyed. I need not say that his own inborn aptitude for high

finance enabled him speedily to master the details of an enterprise whose intricacies would probably have baffled a man less peculiarly endowed, and enabled him to acquire the mass of data which has since been of such value to the community at large.

"When the crash finally came, therefore," continued my mother, keeping a watchful eye on my father to see that he didn't convey to me any secret and disparaging opinion of these public services, to carry back to St. Louis, "when the crash finally came, therefore, the community turned as one man to your father for information and enlightenment. Feeling, as you may well imagine, ran high; wild rumors filled the air, and the most reckless and desperate measures were openly advocated. It was at this perilous juncture that a committee of our leading citizens, apprehensive of the crisis and in order to avert, if possible, the impending outbreak, waited upon your father, and besought him to address to the public, through the columns of the *Clarion*, a few quieting and hopeful words. I believe," said my mother, again interrupting herself and turning to my father for corroboration, "that was the expression used by Mayor Pitkin, my love?"

My father (whose eyes were on the ceiling) made the comfortable noise in his throat I had before heard, and murmured, "'Quieting and hopeful'!"

"Just so," said my mother; "that was the request made to your father by a committee of our leading citizens, headed by the mayor. That request your father acceded to, and the next evening there appeared in the *Clarion* an appeal headed, 'Steady, fellow Missourians, steady!' that at once allayed public feeling, calmed the apprehension of the law and order party, and brought the mind of the community away from the contemplation of immediate and violent measures of reprisal, to fix it upon reasonable and just expectations of future legal redress. The article," said my mother, with pride, "was double-leaded and printed in black-face

type. I believe I am not consciously biased when I say that no appeal from the pen of any publicist in the memory of the present generation of Missourians created the impression that your father's article created in the community in which we reside. It was said of it by one of our foremost citizens—Major Popplewick, you will recall, my love,—in a public mass-meeting and amid long and continuous applause, that it had stemmed the tide of anarchy and arrested the hand of the incendiary by the clear force of reason and logic, unsupported by bayonets and unenforced by penalties. I believe," said my mother, again turning to my father for corroboration, "that that was Major Popplewick's expression?"

My father, with his eyes still on the ceiling, moved his lips silently, but they seemed to form the words, "'Unsupported by bayonets and unenforced by penalties'!"

"Just so," said my mother; "that was one of many expressions of public gratitude and approval. The reception of this article was such that your father was induced to write others during the public agitation that preceded and followed the appointment of receivers for the Company, and these were no less successful than the first. They were signed," said my mother, with her eyes on my father's unconscious face, "—not for the purpose of disguise, for it was well known whose pen they came from—they were signed, 'Junius'——"

"That was your idea, my love," said my father, bringing his eyes down from the ceiling and patting my mother's hand; "the credit for that belongs wholly to you."

"It *was* my idea," said my mother, with pride; "I confess it; and, while I can not suppose it contributed anything to the success of the articles, it is possible, I conceive, that it lent them a tone—a literary tone—they would not have derived from the signature of 'Constant Reader' or even 'Veritas'!"

It being clear from the way they both looked at me that

my opinion was invited upon this bold stroke, I hastened to say that it was brilliantly conceived and historically instructive; which answered just as well as if I had meant anything in particular by that.

"These letters," resumed my mother, accepting this opinion with equanimity, "or perhaps they could be more accurately termed philippics,"—"Much more," I assented, as she paused and looked at me with new complacency over the happy recollection of this word—"these philippics appeared regularly in the *Clarion* during several months, and at last there grew up in the minds of the local stockholders of the wrecked mine (who comprise a large majority of the adult population of this community) a conviction that your father should be one of the receivers. His name was accordingly presented to the Court in Boston (you are aware that the Company was of Massachusetts origin) and his appointment petitioned. The petition was signed," said my mother, looking round, "by every adult male citizen in the town, with the single exception of one ignorant individual——"

"Jim Bunker," said my father, gloomily.

"James Bunker, who has since migrated to Arkansas, and since whose departure," said my mother, with a short laugh, "numerous petty thefts of chickens and of clothing from backyard lines have unaccountably ceased."

"And didn't the petition have any effect?" I asked, apprehending from certain signs that my mother was likely to pursue Mr. Bunker into Arkansas unless called back.

My mother gave another short hard laugh. "Oh, yes; it had an effect. It had the effect of hastening the appointment of three receivers from Boston before further pressure could be brought to bear from this quarter in your father's favor. Oh, they saw to that!"

"They?" I hinted.

"The ring, the clique, the propaganda," explained my mother, with a bitter shake of her head, "who have con-

spired to retain possession of the property and administer its assets in their own interests, and in particular to keep your father out. The Boston gang!" said my mother, with quite a savage and bloodthirsty air.

"But the fight, I take it," I pursued, as my mother paused in bitter contemplation of these wrongs, "the fight is by no means given up?"

"By no means," said my father, striking in and bringing his clenched fist down on the table till the dishes rattled, "by no manner of means! As long as I can wield a pen and the obstructive tactics of the opposition are confined to abortive attempts to compel the suspension of the *Clarion* by the surreptitious introduction of—er—carpet tacks into the press, the contest will go on!"

"There is opposition in the town, then?" I asked.

"There is a sort of low, underhanded intriguing," returned my father, "that I can not dignify by calling opposition, which employs in its vicious offices the most vile and ribald element of our population. It became apparent a short time after the arrival here of the Boston receivers. I say no more."

"Well, after all," I said, cheerfully, "if the Junius letters didn't get you the receivership, I judge they were the means of getting you the editorship of the *Clarion*?"

"I was coming to that," said my mother, forestalling my father's reply, in maintenance of her firm resolution to allow him no opportunity to influence me improperly in the opinions I was to carry back to St. Louis, "I was coming to that, and you have guessed very near to the truth. The former editor of the *Clarion*—not to disparage him in the least—was an ignorant, blatant, unlettered, cowardly, drunken sot, a dead beat, and an absconder. If I do him injustice you will correct me, Bermondsey. The very great financial advantage which his paper derived, from the very first, from your father's scholarly contributions, should have at once suggested to him the justice and fairness of

entering into an arrangement with your father for their regular payment at the accepted rates governing that class of literary work. To any but an ignorant and boorish mind the correctness of this course would have been instantly clear, particularly when it was known that the author was not in employment, and was debarred, by the exactions of these literary labors in the public interest, from seeking employment. But, being an untutored hind, who had brought to the delicate and discriminating duties of editorship the understanding and the perceptions of a job-printer, he did *not* propose this arrangement to your father, and your father was obliged to propose it to *him*. To such base traffic and barter," said my mother, shaking her head with indignation, "was literary ability compelled to descend in this supposedly civilized State of Missouri and in this enlightened end of an enlightened century! However," she continued, setting her lips, not at all as if she were swallowing her indignation at this state of things, but had merely put it under hatches for the time being, "however, your father's ultimatum once laid down, even this creature had the sense to see that the continued success of the *Clarion* depended upon his acceding to its demands, and he consented, after much debasing haggling, to enroll your father as a regular salaried staff writer. So far the prospect looked promising. The stipulated compensation, though by no means dazzling, was fair, and there could be little doubt but that the demand for your father's work, by steadily extending the sphere of what, until now, had been a mere country newspaper of indifferent worth, would justify him in indulging future expectations of a substantial increase. So far, I say, the prospect was promising. But what," said my mother, leaning toward me over the tea table and putting the proposition to me very slowly and distinctly, "what matters the amount of your *stipulated* income, and whether it be large or small, if your *actual* income is *nil*?"

"You mean that the salary was not paid?" I cried, indignantly.

My mother nodded darkly. "It was *not* paid, except with vague and indefinite references to 'next week,' or 'better times,' or 'when the crops moved,' and with other deceptive artifices known to low and evasive minds. Not one cent of money did your father receive for all the months of work he devoted to the interests of the community and the upbuilding of the *Clarion*!"

"Why, it's an outrage!" I cried, hotly. "Why didn't he refuse to continue the contributions, or bring an action——"

My mother raised her hand mildly. "Purely selfish considerations might have induced such a course. But your father had a higher duty, he was playing a stake for the whole community. He might, indeed, have stopped his articles; he might, indeed, have collected the stipend due by recourse to legal proceedings, but he chose a nobler course and adhered to it. Although your father's employer broke his contract with him, your father did not break *his* contract with society. He continued his labors, piling up his employer's debt, and in the end his unselfishness was rewarded."

"In what way?" I asked, eagerly.

"The time came," said my mother, slowly, looking at me with a certain intentness, "when a little computation disclosed the fact that the sum of your father's accumulated and unpaid earnings more than equaled the pecuniary interest which the editor of the *Clarion* had in that sheet!"

My mother spoke these words very quietly and with a certain demureness quite foreign to her usual direct style. She now sat quietly creasing the table-cloth with her fingers and glancing at my father, who glanced at me and then fixed his eyes on the ceiling again. The occasional noise in his throat, growing more and more comfortable, which

I had before noted, alone testified his attention to my mother's discourse.

"When this remarkable fact became known to your father's friends," resumed my mother, with the same demureness of voice and expression, "the situation (we suppose, we do not *know*) was quietly represented by them to the editor, and his attention invited to the inevitable result of these anomalous conditions. It was pointed out to him (we assume, we can only guess at these things) that your father's capital, which he had put into the *Clarion* in the shape of his articles, made him at that moment the actual controlling owner, and, further, that he could continue his articles (which the editor had no means of stopping except by paying for them, which he was now unable to do) until nothing that he owned in the shape of real or personal property would be any longer his."

"And what was the result of these representations?" I asked, with much interest, for my mother had paused and was again busying herself with the folds of the table-cloth.

"Oh," replied my mother, looking up with an air of abstraction as if she had quite forgotten that she had not finished her account, "to be sure, the result. Well, he blustered at first (we understand, we have no first-hand knowledge of what took place, of course) and talked of getting out an injunction against your father to prevent him writing any more articles, but he didn't make the attempt. The consequences of the position into which he had got himself preyed on his weak intellect and—and he ran away—left town overnight, and has not since been heard from. Probably," said my mother, with a sudden vindictive remembrance of Mr. Bunker, "he went to Arkansas."

This somewhat high-handed proceeding made me gasp for a moment, and then it came into my mind how the Prince of Orange frightened King James out of his three kingdoms and sat down on his vacant throne; and discerning in this a historical and legal precedent for my father's



action, I dismissed my first doubts about the validity of his proprietorship and congratulated him warmly upon his deserved good fortune.

"There is a small interest in the paper," said my mother, listening with approval to my commendations, "held by another party, the honest if narrow-minded individual who performs the manual labor incident to its publication and distribution——"

"Mat Glowrie," said my father, without removing his eyes from the ceiling.

"Matthew Glowrie, and this interest constitutes the sole check to the policy your father has endeavored to shape in the conduct and attitude of the paper toward public questions. Mr. Glowrie, though an honest man and a great admirer of your father, has a very slight conception of the true function of journalism. He would," said my mother, shaking her head pityingly over the benighted state of Mr. Glowrie's mind, "he would, if your father would hear of it, entirely eliminate the editorial page and fill it up with advertisements! Judge of the trying situation in which your father is placed in conducting, with an associate of this description, a paper which it is the dream of his life to make a tribune of the people! Judge of the disadvantages he labors under when it is an incident of almost daily occurrence for him to be informed, when the editorial page is half set up, that the case of long primer is exhausted, or that the advertisement of a farm-implement house will have to be run in, in place of the leading articles!"

"It must be trying, certainly," I assented.

"Trying! It's not to be borne, and so I tell your father. I have given it as my opinion," said my mother, throwing herself back in her chair, "that, sooner or later, the point must be settled whether the *Clarion* is to be conducted for pelf alone, or whether it shall realize the higher conception of the public duty of a newspaper, sleepless, fleet-footed, falcon-winged, argus-eyed, and clarion-tongued, and break

the bread of truth, without fear or favor, to a community sadly in need of that description of intellectual sustenance."

With these remarks (which I afterwards discovered were taken from my father's salutatory article) my mother rose and began to clear away the tea-things, and, shortly after, pleading the weariness of my journey, I withdrew to bed and was lulled to sleep by the regular tramp of my father pacing the floor in the next room and turning over in his mind the subject of the next day's leading article.

## CHAPTER XXV

### A DISCOVERY

**M**Y mother refusing to let me out of the house the next day until she had got from me a rather particular and circumstantial account of everything that had happened to me, from the time I had been left in Mr. Walpole's care, down to "the moment that she bade me tell it," it was late afternoon before I finally got away and strolled down to the *Clarion* office. My father was not in when I got there, so I renewed my acquaintance with Mat, who was making preparations to "kick her off," and speedily became, under his direction, an earnest student of that technical process. I was lending what help I could by taking the damp "insides" from the folding-tables, as they were deposited by the press, and replacing them on the feeder ready to receive the outside impression, when there was a bounding step on the stair, and a dashing, handsome man, smartly dressed, but with just the least suggestion of loudness, burst into the room by kicking open the door with his patent-leather boot and kicking it shut again after him.

"Upon my life, Mat," said the gentleman, dusting his boot with his glove, "you're so infernally dirty in here your very door-knob isn't to be touched!"

He was dark, almost swarthy in complexion, with a black, upcurling mustache, fine, insolent eyes, that he was evidently well-practiced in the use of, and white, even teeth of which he was also too well aware. A handsome enough face, but as he looked up at us while dusting his boot, I thought it would be terrible in anger, too.

"You'll find it cleaner down to Ferringway's," replied Mat, imperturbably.

"Yes; and a damned sight better company."

"Poss'ble; better for yo', an' better w'en they come than w'en they go away, I reckon, leastways ef they happen to strike Ferringway's afore they drop in at Jack Rantoul's place."

An ugly look came into the other's face for a second, but it was gone in a twinkling, and his white teeth shone again in a smile under the black mustache; a transition that went far to confirm my first impression, for faces capable of such sudden changes are not the best faces.

"You're feeling wormy to-day, Mat; somebody's withdrawn their subscription, I reckon. Where's the Colonel?"

"Don't know," said Mat, shortly.

"Well, I'll wait till you find out. But don't ask me to sit down in your greasy chairs; I'll stand."

"I won't," returned Mat.

The other laughed, and loitered up and down the room striking his leg with his glove, glancing occasionally from the window, and humming snatches of various lively airs, till my father came in.

I thought my father seemed a little taken aback at seeing the dashing stranger, but he saluted him politely, addressing him by the title of "Captain," and they shook hands, rather formally.

"You're infernally greasy here, Colonel," said the Captain, as he fastidiously gathered his coat-tails about him and made his way past the imposing-stone toward the inner sanctum, whither my father had courteously waved him, "and infernally inky for a newspaper that prides itself on being so infernally clean."

"We keep all our dirt at home, sir," replied my father, a little stiffly; "we don't scatter it broadcast to contaminate others. Walk in, sir."

They passed into the private office and closed the door, but not until I heard the Captain's voice protesting that the floor was infernally sloppy.

"Who is he?" I asked Mat, with some interest.

For answer Mat, who seemed to be fond of pantomime, snatched up some scraps of paper, ranged them neatly in his hand, and scanned them carefully, with his head on one side and his brow deeply furrowed; finally selecting one and flipping it smartly down on the table between us. Looking up at me, with another ready in his hand, he nodded, flipped that down on the first, nodded again and played the third, and so on till he had emptied his hand, when he swept them all away again, and crooking his arm, raked an imaginary stake into his greasy apron. After which he grinned in his hairy manner and resumed his work.

"A gambler?" I whispered, having suspected as much.

Mat nodded. "Holds out at Ferringway's mos'ly. Poker's his lay now; us'ter run a wheel in Pierce City. Knows his business, too; I seen him."

"But my father called him 'Captain,'" I said.

Mat nodded. "Us'ter be. Regulars too, West P'inter, an' all, but the devil was in him. Killed a man at Fort Scott over keerds, got run outen the army, and took to the pasteboards perfesh'nally. He! He! But I gin him ez good ez he sent, didn't I? He's peart an' clever, is the Captain, but he's cheeky. I don't have to take none of it, I reckon. *I'll* call him!" said Mat, with an air of being deep in play with the Captain, "ef he raises *me* with his cheek, damned quick!"

My father and the Captain were closeted together some little time, during which the steady, low murmur of their conversation reached us through the thin partition and served to allay my first fear that the Captain might have come to shoot. At last the scraping of their chairs and generally raised tones indicated the termination of the interview, and the door being presently opened disclosed my father, evidently in a much more cordial frame of mind than when it had closed on them, shaking hands with the Captain on the threshold.

"I want you, Captain," he said, looking over toward me, "to meet my son. Sumner, come and shake hands with a member, or perhaps I should say an—er—ex-member, of the profession which you have looked forward to from your earliest infancy as your own. Captain, my son; Sumner, Captain Parvin."

For a moment the Captain's smirking face before me, the ink-spattered ceiling over his head, and the oil-soaked floor under his feet, seemed to be revolving in a confused jumble and with inconceivable rapidity, in an orbit of which the Captain's soft, white hand, to which I feebly clung to keep from being drawn into the mad whirl, was the center. How long I stood there holding on to this support, while the revolutions gradually decreased until the ceiling finally stopped over the Captain's head, the floor under his feet, and his smirking face before me, I do not know; but as these things adjusted themselves and I let go his hand my father's voice, beginning very far off and getting nearer and nearer, until he was speaking over my shoulder, was saying:

"And Cæsar looked down upon him from a convenient shelf, beckoning him into Gaul. I always like him to meet military men. A noble profession, sir. While Captain Parvin is not now in the service of the punitive arm of the Government," said my father, turning to me, "he has served there with distinction, and it's a service that leaves its stamp on a man that can not—er—fail to exact recognition and homage—er—ever after."

"Yes," said the Captain, twirling his mustache and glancing down at his symmetrical form, "I've got the shoulders left, I believe."

I murmured something—I don't know what—and the Captain, again shaking hands with my father and bestowing a patronizing nod on me, strolled out, striking his leg with his glove and humming one of his lively airs.

So utterly amazed and dumfounded had I been by hearing my father pronounce a name with which I was so familiar,

and by seeing the bearer of that name, whom I had supposed to be dead, standing before me in the flesh—for no vestige of doubt ever entered my mind that he could be any other than Clara Parvin's husband,—that it was some moments before I could stir from the spot or remove my eyes from the door that had swallowed up the Captain's retreating form. Captain Parvin alive! Captain Parvin, cashiered army officer, duellist, gambler, blackleg, alive and openly pursuing his calling down here in Pitmouth, and under his own name, while that sad-faced, black-robed girl-wife mourned away her widowed, wasted days, oh, wearily, wearily.

I tried to tell myself that it could not be. I tried to believe that the name was only a coincidence, that the facts related by Mat, which now flashed upon me with new meaning, and which corresponded so exactly with the version I had so often heard at school, were coincidences too; but the more I argued with myself the stronger grew my conviction that there could be but one Captain Parvin and that he was the unworthy husband of the unhappy woman who believed him dead! I questioned Mat further, but he could tell me nothing about the Captain's antecedents save what he had related; he was known in half a dozen towns throughout that section and bore the same reputation in all. Beyond this Mat's information related chiefly to the size of certain jack-pots the Captain had won on various occasions, the history of which I was obliged to listen to the rest of the afternoon. Burdened with my secret I could not rest under the uncertainty while there remained any chance of proving or disproving his identity, and while I was not ready to communicate my suspicion to my father, I resolved to question him too, to see if his business with the Captain would throw any light on the matter. I did so that evening and found him somewhat embarrassed by my inquiries.

"Why, you see," he said, "the Captain's position in society here is—er—equivocal, to say the least. Decidedly equivo-

cal. While it has always been my endeavor, in exercising the right enjoyed by every individual, of prescribing the limits of his personal intercourse with certain phases of life with which he is unavoidably brought into contact, to ignore as far as possible the formal interdictions of society, and act upon my own judgment, I do not deny the right of society to impose such interdictions, or, if need be, to—er—enforce them. Therefore,” said my father, taking breath, “I exercised such discrimination when I introduced him to you. I introduced him to you, not as a—er—dicer and gamester, but as an ex-army-officer. If I should introduce Major Popplewick to you (which I will do, by the way), it would not be as a man with a wart on his nose, though such is indubitably the case, but as the—er—leader of the local bar. You perceive my point. Besides which Captain Parvin has behaved very handsomely in a certain matter which I am not at liberty to disclose—er—very handsomely indeed.”

“Do you happen to know anything of the Captain’s antecedents?” I asked. My father shook his head. “Very little. He is from the East, I believe, and is well-connected. He is undeniably a man of education and of sound and well-balanced views—er—except, of course, as regards certain of his theories touching the tenure of personal property.”

“Was there some reason for his getting out of the army?” I hinted.

“I believe there was,” said my father, as if it had just that moment come to his mind; “now that you speak of it, I believe it *was* said that he had—let me see, yes,—had had a violent altercation with a brother officer,” said my father, nodding his head with a satisfied air, and then added, as a minor detail, as he reached for the sugar, “and killed him.”

“And was cashiered,” said I.

“Oh, yes,” said my father, “yes. Discipline, you know, and—altercations between brother officers—oh, dear! not to be tolerated in the army.”



For some reason or another my father seemed strangely predisposed in the Captain's favor; to the extent, it would seem, of representing the altercation with his brother officer, and not the killing, to be the cause of his dismissal from the service, and foreseeing that I should get little information from him, I contented myself with one more question:

"Have you ever heard that Captain Parvin was at one time reported killed?"

My father looked at me with some surprise and shook his head decidedly. "Never! It is absurd on the face of it. If Captain Parvin had been killed, the *Clarion*—which has an admirable local service—would have had a full account of it."

I thought over the matter for a day or two, undecided how to act. Although firmly convinced of the gambler's identity the problem that now confronted me was, What use should I make of the knowledge? And every time I asked myself the question Clara Parvin's face rose before me. Had there been anything in my previous knowledge of the facts, and in my observation of her, to lead me to think that her husband's death had been a relief to her and a welcome freedom? Nothing. Had there, on the contrary, been anything to convince me that it was the Doctor's stern decree that had sought to banish his memory from her life, and had added to the sorrow of her widowhood the bitterness of a father's curse? Everything. From this it was but a step to a startling conclusion: was it not possible that the Doctor, after forcing a separation between his daughter and her husband, and taking her back under his roof, had himself concocted the story of the Captain's death? Somehow, as I thought over these things and the Doctor's fierce beak, steely eyes, and sneering mouth rose before me, it seemed a very probable explanation indeed. The upshot was that, after debating the situation with myself for this length of time and failing to arrive at any satisfactory decision as to my duty in the matter, I took my mother into my confidence and

told her the whole story, and asked her what ought to be done.

Her decision was instantaneous, and was to the effect that the Captain should be immediately apprehended, handcuffed, and shipped back to his wife.

Upon my representing some of the difficulties of this course and pointing out, moreover, that we were by no means sure that she wanted him, much less in this particular condition, she immediately propounded the alternative of kidnapping Mrs. Parvin, first knocking the Doctor down with a chair, and conveying her forthwith to her husband; observing in her usual logical way that, if a reunion between them was to be effected at all, it would have to be in the one way or the other. And then if the meeting and reconciliation *could* take place at the *Clarion* office, and a band be engaged, followed by a supper in the townhall with speeches by Major Popplewick and my father, why, it would be very affecting and agreeable indeed. I thought it safest not to controvert my mother further upon these points, but suffered her to speculate at will, and when she had quite satisfied herself as to the desirability of having my father escort Mrs. Parvin into the office by one door at the same moment that Major Popplewick, with the Captain on his arm, should appear at the other, at which auspicious moment the band, apprised of the happy confrontation by my mother herself dropping her handkerchief from the window, should break into the strains of *Auld Lang Syne*, I gently led her back to the consideration of the means by which we were to ascertain if the intelligence of her husband's being alive would be welcome to Mrs. Parvin. Of the other branch of the subject—the Captain's own reception of this intervention in his affairs—I deemed it wise to say nothing to my mother, judging that if the matter should ever proceed far enough to make necessary the solicitation of his wishes, that delicate office would have to be intrusted to other hands than ours. My diplomatic handling of my mother at last

bore gratifying fruit; for, once she was delivered, without any disputation on my part, of her views upon the important details outlined, her discussion of the matter became eminently lucid and sane.

"Depend upon it, my dear," she said, "if Mrs. Parvin is anything like what you describe her, if you have not been deceived in your observation of her character and behavior, her grief is not for her husband's wickedness and folly, but for her husband's death. If she loved him, and that I think we can not doubt, she would forgive his follies if his life were given back to her. That vulture (this was my mother's designation of the Doctor) is the one to be got round; trust me to read the wife's heart, my dear."

"But, here's another thing," said I, perplexedly. "Would we be doing right, would it be likely to be a kindness to her—knowing what we know—to give her to him again, even if she *were* willing? It's her happiness we have to consider, you know."

"My dear," returned my mother, with the same appearance of knowing all about these things, "trust me to read the wife's heart. She will accept the trial and accept it gladly, and she will win her own happiness from it. Depend upon it," said my mother, and I saw in her face the sudden inspiration, inevitably suggested by the nature of the contest and of the Captain's profession, "depend upon it, when the stake is her own happiness, she will not be likely to let herself be called, not with *her* cards!" My mother shook her head, smoothed her dress, smiled knowingly, and patted my hand, conveying by these significant actions a reassuring hint of the resources of feminine wisdom in games of this sort, designed to remove all doubts from my mind of the final outcome.

"Well," said I, accepting, outwardly at least, this optimistic opinion, "how are we to go about informing her? It's rather a delicate matter, and I don't know, if I should write——"

"You write!" exclaimed my mother. "Mercy on us, child, put that idea out of your head at once! Why, it isn't to be thought of for a moment. You'd make a mess of it the very first thing. I'll write to Mrs. Parvin."

"You!" I exclaimed, involuntarily.

"Certainly," returned my mother, with some warmth. "Can you suggest any reason why I should not?"

No, come to think of it, I couldn't. Indeed, it seemed a very good idea, and the only practicable one; only it had somehow not occurred to me before.

I never saw my mother enter upon the execution of any plan with so much zest. How she enjoyed it! How she petted it and surrounded it with mystery! What long conferences she held with me behind doors, and on the stairs, and in secluded parts of the garden, and what a life we must have led those ill-requited persons who my mother thought it probable were shadowing us! We might have been conspirators plotting an insurrection. Although there could have been no objection to letting my father into the secret, and indeed his co-operation would be very essential later on, my mother, in her enjoyment of her office, preferred to flash signals to me over his unconscious head at tea-time to discussing the matter before him openly. I never knew before what a world of meaning, or rather unmeaning, could be conveyed by a cough, a raising of the eyebrows, a toying of the chin with the hand or even by the simple request to pass the bread, when accompanied by a fixed look and a steady biting of the under lip.

And yet, will it be believed? When the time came to write the letter my mother not only declined my assistance but even refused to let me see what she had written! She said, did I suppose Mrs. Parvin would care to have to thank a *man* for an office like that?

And I hadn't thought of that, either.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### FOLLOWING IT UP

**B**EING engaged in this plot against the Captain, it was a source of much embarrassment to me whenever that gentleman manifested sufficient interest in me to salute me on the street, or to show me, as he occasionally did, polite and unquestionably agreeable attentions (wholly non-professional), the unavoidable acceptance of which tended greatly to complicate my position, as an accomplice in a conspiracy that yet presented a doubt whether it might not entitle him, when it came out, to personal satisfaction at the width of the street, or possibly the sidewalk; for in these sudden adjudications of questions of honor, I recalled that it was not always customary to stop to measure the ground or even to drop a handkerchief. In my aimless wanderings about the town, which frequently led me, indeed, beyond its boundaries and into the wooded hills, I often encountered him, sometimes riding, in yellow leather leggings and gloves, or perhaps like myself idling along on foot; unlike myself, striking at the fallen leaves with a slender, supple cane, said to contain twelve inches of shining steel. On these occasions I had always found the Captain affable and polite, and when the situation permitted of a more extended conversation than was afforded by mere passing salutations, most engaging and entertaining. I soon found that it was only necessary for me to be seen once or twice strolling into town in this way in this company, greatly to enhance my reputation with the sidewalk population (already standing high as the Colonel's son, and generally reputed partner in the house of Sydenham), for the Cap-

tain was a popular man, being both well liked and well feared,—facts constantly borne in upon me with painful impressiveness.

However, being in for it now, I allowed these reflections to disturb me but little, and awaited the next step in the campaign with impatience. I had stipulated that nothing was to be done, so far as the Captain was concerned, until we learned authoritatively from Mrs. Parvin that our discovery had been welcome and our undertaking approved.

At last the reply came. I brought it up myself from the post-office and delivered it to my mother, and I might have been a handwriting expert from the way I studied the superscription all the way.

"Thank you, my dear," said my mother, taking the letter.

"It's from Mrs. Parvin," said I, breathlessly, noting with impatience that she seemed disposed to lay it on the mantel and go on with her dishes.

"Ah?" said my mother, glancing at it again. "I believe you're right, my dear. Although I never saw Mrs. Parvin's handwriting before—and it's a very pretty and delicate hand, by the way; what style would you call it?—I have no doubt it is from Mrs. Parvin."

And will it be believed? My mother calmly tucked the letter in the bosom of her dress and proceeded to wipe the dinner dishes, humming a little tune!

I flung out of the house in a fine indignation and didn't come back till night. A pretty return, to be sure, for the discovery I had made and the risk I was running of getting shot! It would serve them both right if I should throw the whole thing over and go back to St. Louis that very day. But no, that would be unworthy of me; it would be downright mean to desert them at this critical stage; I would stay and see them through the difficulty, but I at least owed it to my dignity to make some sort of a protest, and I should make it by coldly ignoring the slight that had been put upon me—by not giving them the satisfaction of seeing that I

had noticed it—and whenever my co-operation was again solicited, as it would have to be, to accord it with freezing dignity.

But it's hard work keeping one's dignity at the freezing-point for three days at a stretch, and that length of time passed before my mother even mentioned the matter again, and of course I'd have died before I'd have mentioned it to her,—that is, I think I would. But one day, after I had been hinting that I would have to be thinking of getting back to my work again, my mother brought it up.

"About that matter, my dear,—Mrs. Parvin, you know,—you will recall I had a letter the other day."

Subduing my first impulse to experience a difficulty in remembering anything about it, I assented carelessly.

"While the matter is a delicate one to discuss with a third party," said my mother,—“it being as yet an inviolable secret,—I believe I can rely upon your discretion, my dear, and don't mind telling you, as you were a former acquaintance of Mrs. Parvin's and have some knowledge of the circumstances, that, in a general way, and with some reservations, of course, to be the subject of further correspondence between us, she is favorably disposed toward the project I have in hand. That project,” said my mother, with an air of propounding an entirely new, bold, and startling proposition, the sudden revelation of which would probably cause me the greatest astonishment, “is the reconciliation of Mrs. Parvin and her husband, the Captain. And I don't know,” continued my mother, looking at me in a thoughtful manner and revolving the subject in her mind, “I don't know but *you* might be of service in the matter, if you would care to help. Come!” said my mother, with sudden resolution, as if she had quite decided to take the risk. “You're old enough now to exercise sound judgment, and I have confidence in your good sense,—you *shall* help!”

Well, after all it was an affair which a woman was better qualified to handle. A man can't be bothering with domestic

squabbles and that sort of thing. In the first place they don't interest him, and then again he hasn't the time nor the patience if he be a busy man, and the cotton business is exacting enough, I hope!

I smiled indulgently upon my mother and begged her to command me in any way she saw fit. Although, I said, the matter, so far as I understood it, was not one calculated to enlist my interest to any extent, still, in view of her own sympathies being engaged, and as I was there on a vacation for the purpose of relieving my mind of all business cares, which a diversion of this sort might help me, for the time being, to accomplish, why——

"That's right," said my mother, approvingly. "I knew I could rely upon you. Now that you understand fully just how the case stands and what attitude Mrs. Parvin has taken—which I think you will agree is an eminently proper and reasonable attitude, the only one in fact she *could* take with justice to herself—I think you will indorse the opinion I have already formed that the next step to be taken is to approach Captain Parvin. Eh? You think so, too. Very good, then Captain Parvin shall *be* approached. Now," continued my mother, enjoying herself very much, "the next question that naturally presents itself to a logical mind is, how is he to be approached? We must not lose sight of that point," said my mother, firmly, "for it is most essential. *How* is he to be approached?" Propounding this inquiry for the second time my mother threw herself back in her chair ready for a good comfortable argumentative tussle with it.

I said, grimly, that I supposed somebody would have to walk up to him and ask him if he was aware he had a wife who believed him dead, that he would shoot, and that would be all there was to it.

My mother reflected for a moment over this view of the case and shook her head regretfully.

"It would be a fine thing for the *Clarion*," she said, thoughtfully, "but it would spoil our plans, I'm afraid. No,



we mustn't have anything like that. If there was any chance of his missing, it wouldn't be so bad, but the Captain is such a dead shot!—no, we mustn't have anything like that!"

She was equally doubtful at first of the expediency of delegating the office to my father on the ground that, being a public man with political aspirations, he couldn't afford to alienate the sporting vote. But at last, when no more objections could be raised (my mother evincing considerable disappointment at the matter proving so unproductive of logical discussion), it was decided that the task would have to be his, my mother comforting herself as best she could with the observation that, if the Captain should prove intractable, the subject would be a fit one for a new series of Junius letters.

I lost no time in apprising my father of the situation and of the delicate office that had been laid upon him. He was, of course, a good deal astonished, and rubbed the top of his head till it fairly glowed. "Bless my soul!" he kept exclaiming at intervals during my recital. "Bless my soul!" letting off the supplicatory minute-gun with a regularity that suggested a rite of some kind, until I came to unfold my suspicions of the Doctor's part, when he changed it with surprising suddenness and vigor to "Damn his looks!" a form of objurgation very strong indeed for him, and therefore very impressive even without the startling contrast it afforded to his first invocation.

"Mind," I said, "I don't know that this story of the Captain's death originated with the Doctor ("Damn his looks!" said my father), but it looks like it to me. In any case, his wife thought him dead, and now knowing him to be alive is ready to forget his past and be reconciled to him. It is now your part to ascertain if the Captain is equally willing ("Bless my soul!" said my father), and I need not say that this is a task of such delicacy that we had no recourse save to you. If you are successful with the Captain ("Bless my soul!" said my father), as I believe you will be, I think

we can safely leave it to Mrs. Parvin to defend her rights against the Doctor ("Damn his looks!" said my father), should he attempt to throw any further obstacles in the way of their reunion. Mrs. Parvin is a beautiful and lovable woman, and I desire nothing more than to see her happy. I might hesitate, knowing what I do of the Captain, before consenting to deliver her into his arms, did I not believe her chances of happiness to be far greater with him than with her father. ("Damn his looks!" said my father.) I don't think myself that the Captain is a thoroughly bad man, do you?"

"Bless my soul!" said my father.

"It may be that my youthful prejudice still clings, but from the time I first knew Mrs. Parvin and felt rather than saw the tyranny she lived under, I seemed to know, though no word ever passed her lips, that the daily torture of fear and dread that I underwent there for a few hours daily, was her unmingled portion during all the hours of her wasted life. Do you think we could be doing her a wrong in delivering her from it, even under the circumstances we know of?"

"Damn his looks!" said my father. And I knew he would beard the Captain, were he twenty gamblers and each one a dead shot! Dear old Bermondsey!

Being at that moment at white heat (his head quite smoking with the rubbings he had given it), he dispatched me at once to find the Captain, and I sped off to Ferringway's, not at all sorry to have a legitimate excuse for penetrating to that famed region where the goddess Chance—if sometimes with extraneous assistance—dispensed to her devotees favors proportionate to their deserts, and not disproportionate to the deserts of the house.

Ferringway's was over the County Bank—illustrating the fact that wealth is gregarious,—and, occupying the upper floor of what was unquestionably the most pretentious building in town—brick, with stone trimmings and a bay

window paneled in copper,—derived an adventitious respectability from these accessories that was next door to virtue itself. And in some other points, too,—in cleanliness, for instance,—Ferringway's stairs, and Ferringway's floor, and Ferringway's front windows presented a particularly invidious contrast to the drug-store, the barber-shop, the lawyers' offices, and other places of public resort in the town, that was triumphantly pointed out from the pulpit and other clean places as a peculiarly debauching example of the subtle malignity of vice.

Ferringway's door stood open. It was not necessary to have dealings with the police to get into Ferringway's. I paused as the noiseless swinging door closed behind me, and looked about me. The place presented neither the rough barroom aspect that I had expected, nor the bizarre scene that I had hoped. It was a quietly furnished, comfortable-looking room, and but for the number of small, round tables occupying the floor and a faro layout in the further end, it might have been a hotel parlor or the waiting-room of a public office. There didn't seem to be any play going on; several men were lounging in the chairs, smoking and talking, and at one table a gentleman with a bored air was idly constructing a pagoda with cards, a proceeding followed with lazy interest by two or three others, equally bored. Not only was there a lack of the excitement, the animation, the fevered passion, and the electric atmosphere that ought, I argued, to characterize a gambling-place that had any respect for the reputation with which a careful and painstaking literature has invested the profession, but there was almost a lack of life, certainly of anything that could have been called human interest, in any object or topic under the sun. And lest it be thought that this was a condition owing to the hour and to the absence of exciting play, I may say now that the second time I was to look on this scene, which should be by night, when a hundred men should be thronging the tables heaped high with gold, and

the droning hum of the banker should carry its dread message to all their straining hearts, there was the same subdued quietness in the room, the same absence of raised voices, of loud laughs, and of the sudden impulses that commonly move assemblages, as to-day—save for one wild moment, when there occurred the incident of which I shall have to speak, and which would have been just as tragic and stirred the same passions elsewhere as here.

And this was Ferringway's! I was disappointed. I was so disappointed and indignant at having been thus imposed upon that, when I saw the Captain rise hastily from a chair and come toward me, I was conscious of a certain loss of respect for him. He didn't look to be the man I thought him, and I doubted if he was such a dead shot.

"What is it?" he asked, eagerly, coming close up to me, and there seemed to come a sudden flush upon his cheek. "Has your father found out—umph!—have you got a message for me?"

He had checked himself suddenly and turned his first impetuous speech into a careless inquiry, but he could not as suddenly transform his manner, and there was a nervous excitement in his voice and in the hand he let fall on my shoulder, that betrayed some powerful and suddenly roused feeling, that I could not but attribute to some expectation or apprehension produced by my unlooked-for appearance.

I told him simply that my father wanted to see him, if convenient, and without taking the trouble to excuse himself to the company he came away with me at once, still exhibiting signs of suppressed excitement.

When we mounted the stairs we found my father pacing up and down the room between the press and imposing-stone, and he immediately retired with the Captain into the private office, directing me with a glance of his eye not to go away. So eager was the Captain with

some rapid inquiry he addressed to my father, before the door closed upon them, that I distinctly heard the reply.

"No, no! Nothing yet, Captain."

And now it may be easily supposed the Captain's perturbation became mine. I took up the beat my father had left off and paced it till my rising excitement could no longer brook its confined bounds, when I extended it to the sink against the wall. Observing which Mat, by way of sympathetic notice, silently moved the proof-box out of the way so I could take a turn around the rack of bourgeois by the far window.

"Mat," said I, hurriedly, moved by this mute attention, and hanging on my heel a second in my course by his stool, "stand by to lend a hand if there's mischief. I'm a little suspicious of your Captain."

Mat leaned over to see if the hand-roll in the proof-box was within easy reach, and nodded.

"Ef he tries it on yere," he said, darkly, "I kin tell yo' what I'll do; I'll throw ink on his clo's!"

But as the minutes passed and no alarm came from within, the necessity for this extreme measure seemed less and less likely to arise, and I breathed somewhat freer; and after a dozen turns over my lengthened course I felt I had so far recovered my composure as to warrant my contracting it again to its former limits, which I did and found it answered all purposes.

I had my back to the door when I saw Mat suddenly reach for the hand-roll, and wheeled about. The knob turned, the door suddenly opened, and Captain Parvin, with his face white and set, strode without a word through the room to the outer door and passed out; and the click of his heels on the stairs sounded so sharp and distinct to my overwrought nerves that there seemed to be no other noise in all the building nor in the street below.

"Gone after his seconds!" was the thought that flashed

through my mind as I ran into the office and confronted my father.

He was sitting at his desk with his chair pushed back from it, and, leaning back with his thumbs in his vest pockets, contemplating the blotting-pad with a beaming smile. I had not seen him look so pleased since he received the nomination for senator from Missouri in the parlor back of the bookshop.

"Sumner," said my father, shaking hands with me exactly as he had done on that occasion, "it was as I thought, my boy; it was as I thought!"

"How?" I asked, eagerly.

"He is a scoundrel!" said my father.

It was an observation that might fittingly have been accompanied by some manifestation of feeling, by some emphasis of voice, expression, or manner; but my father did not remove his thumbs from his vest pockets, nor cease to beam—except that he now beamed upon me instead of upon the blotting-pad,—and in his rich, husky voice there was a distinct note of satisfaction as if he had bestowed the highest encomium upon the party referred to!

"Who?" I cried. "The Captain?"

"Sumner," said my father, with some reproach in his voice, "you saw the Captain walk down the stairs with—er—all his bones intact? The scoundrel I refer to, the villain, the plotter, the—the fiend, would not have walked out so, I apprehend. No, the Captain is vindicated. That is why it gives me pleasure—paradoxical as the remark may appear—to state the fact that the Doctor is a scoundrel, a villain, a plotter, and a fiend!"

It certainly did give him pleasure. He removed his thumbs from his vest pockets to rub his palms together, after which he rubbed them briskly on his knees and then laid them on the top of his head, as if he were taking the emotional temperature of his body at all of these points with the object of determining where he felt it the most.

"George Parvin," he resumed, after deciding the point, apparently, in favor of the top of his head, for he left his hands clasped there, "was a young Captain not long out of West Point when he met Clara Pusey. Of his right and fitness to aspire to the hand of the lady there could be no question; an officer holding a commission in the Army of the United States is entitled to a presumption of eligibility. That is plain. But Doctor Pusey (who is a scoundrell!) interposed from the first every objection which rancor and vindictive malignity could dictate. With what result? The young couple were married secretly, and were almost immediately separated by an unexpected order transferring the Captain to a distant post. While no proof exists of the fact, it is not unsuspected that there were secret influences behind this sudden assignment, especially as it was followed by others, at such intervals as suggested other motives than the good of the service, which for a considerable period kept the young officer in an unsettled state on special service, and, of course, afforded no opportunity of his being joined by his bride. It was not long before the young wife communicated to her husband the intelligence that the Doctor (who is a villain!) had become aware of their marriage, and thence began, for her, a systematic course of persecution, deception, and treachery instituted by the Doctor (who is a fiend!) for the purpose of alienating her from the Captain and bringing about their permanent separation. To this end recourse was had to every expedient which satanic ingenuity could devise, and neither misrepresentation, falsehood, nor artfully contrived calumnies were spared to poison her mind. At last an unfortunate event occurred which signally aided the plot which this unnatural father was carrying on against his own flesh and blood. An unhappy quarrel, in which Captain Parvin had become involved with a brother officer, suddenly culminated one night under circumstances which left him with only a second to choose whether it should be his life or his

enemy's. His brother officer fell. Captain Parvin made no effort to exculpate himself, but the court-martial which followed so far exonerated him as to relieve his act of any criminal taint. Discipline, of course, required his relegation from the service. It was this unhappy event which suggested to the Doctor (who is a wretch!) his crowning infamy. By distorting the facts with an inhuman ingenuity, he represented to his daughter that it was her husband who had been killed, and with a gratuitous cruelty that reveals the depth and blackness of his depravity, he made it appear that his death had been met in an ignominious brawl over a woman!"

"But how——" I broke out.

My father raised his hand and checked my interruption. "Wait and let me finish. The rest is still more horrible to conceive. To make doubly sure of his purpose the monster, at the same time, caused to be conveyed to the Captain the false and hellish intelligence of the death of his wife! You may well start. You may well recoil with horror. Although your suspicions of foul play were correct, they did not go half far enough; the responsibility for the grief and despair of the husband, which drove him to folly and wickedness, as well as for the grief and despair of the wife, which drove her to a life of secret and consuming sorrow, rests alike with the Doctor, who is a scoundrel, a villain, a fiend, and a brute!"

"But," said I, perplexed,—“this is a terrible recital, to be sure, and I believe it is every word true,—but there are one or two points I don't understand. You learned these facts just now from the Captain?”

My father nodded.

"Then he already knew before this interview that his wife had believed him dead?"

"Yes."

"Why did he not undeceive her?"

"My dear boy, if you will stop to think you will see that



you are reasoning *a priori*. He has believed her to be dead until this moment. The information came to him direct from the Doctor, and as he was, of course, ignorant at that time of the plot against him, and that the same false intelligence had been conveyed to his wife in regard to *his* death, he believed the cruel lie."

"But," said I, still in the dark, "how did he come to learn only part of the truth? How was it, when he learned that his wife had believed *him* dead for so long, that he didn't learn also that *she* was not dead?"

My father had leaned back and fixed his eyes on the ceiling, and with his hands clasped across his breast comfortably revolved his thumbs and made no reply.

"He only just learned—just now when you told him—that the report of her death was false?" I persisted.

"Yes," replied my father, with his eyes on the ceiling.

"Well, say, look here, Bermondsey!" I expostulated, "this thing don't look right at all. There's something wrong somewhere. When the Captain learned that a false report of his death had been conveyed to his wife and that she had believed it—and you say he had learned it before to-day?"

"Yes," said my father, with his eyes still on the ceiling.

"When he learned that do you mean to tell me it never occurred to him to investigate, to see if the report that had reached him of her death was not equally false?"

"It did *not* occur to him. At the time he learned half of the truth (as you so aptly termed it) he received—from the same source—confirmation of her death. He could have had no reason to doubt such confirmation, having no suspicion."

"Possibly not. What was this source?"

My father had suddenly become so absorbed in the ceiling that I had to repeat the inquiry.

"Eh?" said he, recovering from his abstraction under this persistence. "The source? Yes, to be sure; hah! the source was—a friend."

"A friend! A friend of hers or of his?"

"Of both. First of hers. He knew her in her father's home. Later he came here and became acquainted with the Captain, and corroborated, as I said, the account of Mrs. Parvin's death. Hah! Yes."

"He must have been a precious friend!" said I, pointedly.

"Yes," returned my father, quietly, "I apprehend the same thought had occurred to the Captain when he walked out a moment ago."

## CHAPTER XXVII

### A TRAIL, AND WHAT IT LED TO

**A**ND now that this affair seemed to be progressing toward so favorable a conclusion, I made my preparations for my departure; the time I had proposed to myself for my visit drawing to a period. Moreover, I had received a friendly letter from Mr. Sydenham saying that he proposed giving Harold a little dinner on his twenty-first birthday, which fell on that day week, which I must by no means miss. I did not encounter the Captain again in the few remaining days of my stay. It was said, indeed, that he was not seen at his former haunts and passed his time instead in long rides through the surrounding hills; from which he often returned with his black mare in a lather of sweat, and in a mood, as some few acquaintances had occasion to testify, the opposite of communicative. Speculation, indeed, as to the reasons for this sudden change of habit was singularly barren, and I believe those curious ones who were at the trouble of pursuing their inquiries in the neighboring towns with the object of fathoming the purpose of these breakneck excursions, were no more successful than those others who discussed it in their chairs at Budlong's.

I should have been as well pleased, perhaps, if my father had not chosen the public platform of the railroad station as the place, and the moment of the arrival of the train as the time, to entrust to me his compliments to Mr. Sydenham and to clinch a few blows on my own account by advertising the cotton business among his fellow citizens who had congregated to see the train come in.

"I should be happy," he said, shaking hands with me, and looking around at this gathering, "I should be happy to accord Mr. Sydenham space in the *Clarion* (which, by the way, you will have the goodness to inform him shall be mailed to him at his office every day) at any time he will do me the honor to make it the—er—medium for the communication of his views upon the cotton situation to the people of the Southwest. That people, though themselves allied rather to the mineral than to the agricultural interests, follow with no inattentive eye the fortunes of that staple, with which the prosperity of their near neighbors in the contiguous State of Arkansas is so signally bound up, in the—er—markets of the world. That people, though remote from 'towered cities and the busy hum of men,' from marts and exchanges and the fevered throb of trade, are yet by no means a bucolic people; in their veins runs the blood of a race of traders; to them the name of Sydenham is no alien name and the House of Sydenham no—er—alien house. That people——" But here the whistle of the train drowned my father's voice, and I was glad to get aboard and leave him to finish his speech to the rest of his audience, which I distinctly saw him doing as the train pulled out, and I even doubt if he noted my departure.

Although I had a day or two to spare before the evening of the dinner, I experienced the greatest difficulty in getting an hour to myself to go and see Kate. At last I made the miserable excuse to Mr. Cressey that my mother had sent Kate some geranium slips (which was very true, only I had forgotten them and left them in the train) which would perish unless potted at once and, as he made no suggestion in the premises, muttered that I guessed I'd take a run out with them before I forgot them; and actually set out for the Manchester Road at ten o'clock in the morning, purchasing some kind of green thing from a florist on the way, that afterwards turned out to be a cactus!

Of the events of that never-to-be-forgotten morning im-

partial memory chiefly recalls how I found her in the back-yard feeding tame pigeons, and couldn't get her to be serious and say she was glad I had come back; how she gave me the greatest alarm by wanting to talk about Harold and the big dinner he was to have, from which her father had undertaken to bring her certain specified delicacies in his pocket; how she pretended to have forgotten when I told her I had delivered to my mother the kiss she had sent, and how she instantly detected the fib when I hinted that I had a similar commission from her in return; how Mrs. Cressey appeared on the back porch polishing a dish-pan, and demanded to know if Mr. Sydenham had had a "stroke," adding, without waiting for my denial, that she had always suspected he would go off that way and had frequently remarked as much to John, who, as usual, had paid no attention to his mother's words, and how she was highly indignant when finally apprised of her error, and demanded to know if Mr. Sydenham called himself a gentleman "going about" frightening people with false reports of his dissolution, and how I could justify my own action in lending myself to this questionable practice? how I wildly implored Kate to tell me if she really intended to marry me sometime (I wouldn't insist upon knowing when; I would wait until I was gray, if necessary), or if she was merely amusing herself breaking my heart in wanton, cruel sport; how I besought her to pause before she drove a strong man to desperation, and cited Cleopatra and Helen of Troy, and the wars and desolation they had caused by holding too lightly the passions they had inspired; how Kate said she wished I wouldn't frighten the pigeons so and—would I go into the house and bring her another pan of meal? how I bitterly retorted that she might well say pigeons, and laughed wildly, ha! ha! ha! three distinct times; how she asked, with dignity, what did I mean by that, sir? and how I answered, with gloomy mystery, that it didn't matter what I meant; how she asked, did I intend

to get that meal or did I not? and how I seized the pan, took three mighty strides to the house, scooped the pan full, took three mighty strides back, and thrust it into her hands with a lunge that spilled half of it, scared away every last pigeon, and made her cry; how I then tore my hair, beat myself upon the breast, and called myself monster, wretch, brute, assassin, and cried out for her to name the particular kind of torture and death that would give her the most satisfaction to have me undergo, so that I might go straight off and make the necessary arrangements; how, instead of going straight off, I tried to pull her hands away from her face and dry her eyes with my handkerchief, and how she said (sob) did I want to strangle her (sob) with the smell of my old tobacco; how I threw the offending handkerchief away, and putting my arm around her waist walked with her up and down the gravel path underneath a grave-vine, and obtained at last her forgiveness, and in turn promised, unasked, to live; how the greedy pigeons (who had only pretended to go away) came back and ate up all the meal, and I picked up the pan and carried it to the house, penitently straightening out the dents; how I then produced my nondescript purchase, and unblushingly told how my mother had sent it with certain instructions for its transplanting, which I had written down and left in my other coat, but which I would bring with me next time; and how I finally took myself off and meditated all the way back the things I might have said to much better advantage if I had thought of them in time.

As Mr. Sydenham wouldn't hear of either Harold or me going to the office on Harold's birthday, we found ourselves turned into the street on that auspicious morning a good deal as we had been the first day we arrived in town. Not being much given to sentiment, however, Harold only snorted when I made allusion to the fact, and drew a handful of money from his pocket, glanced at it a moment, and thrust it back; considering the coincidence sufficiently

shattered by this significant by-play without the addition of words. Frank thought it would be a good idea to go down and see "Old Gabe" on the *Natchez*, which we did, and went across with him, and he showed us a string of notches cut on a beam over his bunk, which he said represented the number of free ferries he had bestowed under his agreement with Mr. Sydenham, and there were more than I cared to count. It made me feel queer to think that one of them represented me—which one was it, I wondered?—and to speculate on the diversity of fortunes that may have befallen the representatives of those other notches since the day their records were made. Harold said, indifferently, that probably most of them were in jail, and to come along on deck and quit mooning; that that sort of thing was an indication of a diseased mind, and would I chuck it, now! So I "chucked" it and we went up on the levee on the Illinois side, and I pointed out the spot where I had first seen Mr. Sydenham, and Harold said it looked pretty much like the other spots about there, didn't it? to which I replied, warmly, that it did; I was aware of it and didn't have to be informed of the fact by him if he *was* twenty-one, but I hoped I had a right to speak without having my head taken off; to which Harold said, who said I didn't? to which I said, nobody that I was aware of, but if there was anybody, no matter what their age might be, I'd like to see 'em try it on; to which Harold said, well then, what was I trailing my wing for, then? to which I retorted that I was *not* trailing my wing, but I didn't propose to have anyone jump down *my* throat—not if I was aware of it; to which Harold retorted that he had not attempted to jump down my throat, and that so far from taking that liberty himself he wouldn't stand by and see it done, and there was his fist on it, if I wasn't too damned proud to take it; to which I instantly replied that I wasn't too proud, and there was mine, by God! and my heart with it. This understanding happily arrived at we made our

way back, and Frank was very anxious to bet different sums on the identity of various boats coming up the river, but, getting no takers, was compelled to guess at them gratuitously, and missed all but one.

We had idled away most of the afternoon by the time we got back to Gabe's berth and found him just casting off for another trip, having made one in our absence. We scrambled aboard and I immediately plunged down to the engine-room, which was the chief attraction for me, and as I passed Gabe's bunk I glanced up at his unique passenger record again, and there, at the end, were two freshly-cut notches!

"Here, fellows!" I cried, sticking my head up again, "Gabe's had two more! What were they like, Gabe?"

They came tumbling down and Gabe stumping after them, wiping his hands on a piece of waste and grinning.

"Look here, Gabe," said Frank, inspecting the new entries, "you ought to make these fellows work their way over. Why, you hadn't ought to need any regular hands at all!"

"They did, these two," replied Gabe, with a significant air.

"What did you make 'em do—shovel coal?"

Gabe wagged his head with an air of mystery, shut one eye, thrust his tongue into his cheek, and after slowly revolving three separate times on his wooden leg with his elbows thrust out in a rakish manner, concluded this astonishing performance by losing countenance altogether before our wondering gaze, and sheepishly wiping his great face with the oily waste in his hand.

"What are you driving at?" demanded Frank. "They didn't give you anything to drink, did they?"

Gabe repudiated this inquiry with a countenance expressive of extreme repulsion, and, directing his gaze by us at his bunk in the corner, said, with an air of conscious virtue contending with a strong sense of injury:

"Ye ain't very noticin', seems like. Ye might take a look



round afore throwin' out insinooations of a natur' kal'lated to——" Here Gabe got into difficulty, backed up, and tried it again: "insinooations of a natur' kal'lated to"—only to balk once more at the same point, and after meditating a moment over this surprising state of things, during which he appeared, from the movement of his lips, to be running over the words to himself with no better success, concluded with some dejection, "insinooations of that natur'."

We all turned and looked at the bunk in the corner, and I think we all recognized at the same moment the change that had taken place there. The heap of worn blankets had been carefully smoothed out across the narrow sleeping-shelf and tucked in; the sodden-looking blue "ticking" pillow, that bore greasy impressions of Gabe's head, fantastically patterned by his tossings till they might have been the spectrum of his dreams, was shaken up, moulded into such a shape as its long abuse permitted, and stood at the head of the bunk in a state of rigidity suggesting sudden petrification at the sight of the transformation of the room; Gabe's rubber boots stood at the foot of the bunk, precise and rigid as the pillow; Gabe's spare leather boots at the top; and Gabe's hat, coat, and clean overalls hung upon convenient nails; and, most astounding of all, upon the little shelf where stood Gabe's shaving mug and other toilet accessories lay a fragrant bunch of fresh, wet flowers, reflected in the glass, reflected almost in the dingy walls and ceiling, so completely did they freshen and transform the dinginess; their delicate petals quivering with every turn of the boat's wheel!

I think the same thought came to us all at the same moment, and Frank voiced it.

"Gabe," he said, sternly, fixing the old man with his eye, "a woman did that!"

Gabe drew himself up. "Ef," he said, loftily, "ef a leddy, as is a leddy, chooses fer to hail this yer boat an' come over the side, it's not fer the owner o' this yer boat to send a

shot across her bows w'en he has a bargain with the man (which is a man!) as giv' him thet boat of a natur' kal'lated"—and here I saw a sudden light come into Gabe's face and I knew he saw his way clear to retrieve his former failure—"of a natur' kal'lated to encourage of 'em comin' over the side in enny numbers, barrin' neither sect nor gender, male or female, man or woman!"

"Gabe," said Frank, with the same sternness, "do you mean to say you've been carrying a lady on this old tub and that she made up that bunk and left those flowers!"

"Ef," replied Gabe, with the same loftiness, "ef thet leddy chooses fer to overhaul this yer boat an' arsk me to p'int out objecks she may hev heerd on but never see on a boat, it ain't fer me to signal half-speed; no, sir! I give her her head an' let her go, merely keepin' a hand on her wheel, so to speak, so's she wouldn't fall in the coal-pit or ram her bunnit ag'in the deck beams, an' she fetches up yere. 'Oh!' sez she,"—and Gabe, in his endeavor to make his recital as realistic as possible tried to imitate the lady's voice when she said it,—"'Oh!' sez she, 'this is your stateroom, Mr. Price——'"

"Hold on, Gabe," interrupted Frank, "go slow. How'd she know your name?"

"I am merely relatin' the facks," returned Gabe, with dignity. "I'm not undertakin' to explain 'em."

"Good idea. Heave ahead."

"'Oh!' sez she, 'this is your stateroom, Mr. Price,'" resumed Gabe, repeating the words sternly, and not at all in the lady's voice. "'How nice! But,' sez she, a-laughin', 'it's easy to see, Mr. Price, you're not a married man,' an' with thet she dives at thet yer bunk, yanks off the blankets, shakes of 'em out, spreads 'em back ag'in, tucks of 'em in, hangs up my clo's, rubs up my lookin'-glass with her lace han'kercher, an' rattles on all the time about me oughter bein' married an' hev it done ev'ry day. Well," said Gabe, rolling the waste which he still retained in his hand be-

tween his palms, "it needed it. Yes, it did," he repeated, resolutely, looking round at us as if we had denied the point, "it needed it. An' then," he resumed, having carried this contention against us, and speaking with a further accession of loftiness, circumspection, and painstaking attention to detail, "she smiles at me,"—I had a horrible idea for a moment that he was going to show us how she did it, but if the thought had crossed his mind he dismissed it,— "she smiles at me an' sez, 'A little touch of color, Mr. Price, an' you'll be quite gay here,' and with thet she takes thet bokay from her cor-sarge"—Gabe was quite complacent over the use of this word—"an' cocks it up thar ag'in the lookin'-glass: 'a little momentoe,' she sez, smilin' at me ag'in, 'of our delightful expeeryouence.'" I may say that as Gabe's dignity increased under the somewhat incredulous reception accorded his recital, and his politeness became more labored, his pronunciation became highly involved and circumstantial.

"And what was the other one like?" asked Frank. "You've got two notches here. Was she another escaped lunatic or this one's keeper?"

Gabe breathed hard, and looked away from the sceptic to the smoothed-out bunk, the punched-up pillow, the boots on the floor, the clothes, the looking-glass, and the flowers, as if to draw moral strength from these mute witnesses to crush the rash scoffer who had spoken.

"Ef," he said, slowly, thus reinforced, "the promptin's of envy, disapp'intment, or other feelin's of a natur' kal'lated to"—but finding himself on this treacherous ground he hastily withdrew and shifted his course—"ef disapp'intment at not bein' yere to receive the smiles and bokays thet wuz my fortin to receive, hez so fur clouded your jedgment ez to lead yo' to refer to the leddy whose notch I hez hed the pleasher to cyarve on thet beam, ez an escaped loonatic, mebbey evidence of *this* sort will convince yo' of the quality of folks they wuz!" And Gabe pulled a glittering

twenty-dollar gold piece from his pocket and held it out triumphantly.

"Did she give you that, too?" asked Frank, opening his eyes.

"He giv it to me," replied Gabe, putting it back in his pocket. "I reckon they didn't *hev* to kem across on my boat! I reckon they could hev went across the bridge!"

"The other was a man, then?"

"I showed you the money, didn't I?" returned Gabe, reproachfully. "In course he wuz a man. Yo' can look at it ag'in ef yo' want to;" and once more Gabe produced the coin and held it out, as if it constituted the clearest proof of the sex of the giver.

"Fugitives from justice probably," said Harold, carelessly. "Had good reasons for not wanting to cross the bridge. I'd advise you to get rid of that money, my man, and to forget that you carried passengers of that sort on a boat chartered to push freight cars."

"Ef," replied Gabe, stoutly, strengthening himself with another look at the bunk, the clothes, the looking-glass, and the flowers, "ef the leddy *wuz* a fugitive, either from justice or injustice, an' she should ever hev occasion to fugit back the other way, I'll kerry her over ag'in an' on this boat, charter or no charter, by the livin' hokey!" Making this declaration with great forcefulness Gabe emphasized it by a tremendous knock on the floor with his wooden leg, and the space being rather limited for demonstrations of this sort, knocked over one of the boots at the foot of the bunk. Stooping, the old man picked it up again, carefully stood it up in exactly the same spot it had before occupied, handling it with as much care and tenderness as if it had been a baby, and softly backed away to the door, waved us out ahead with his hand and gently closed it after him; being as careful not to make a noise as if his fair passenger, after making up his bunk, had got into it and gone to sleep.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### A SURPRISE

AS I knew the clerks from the office were to be present at the dinner, and that they were chiefly distinguished in their social habits by gregarious insouciance and cigarettes, I was somewhat surprised, when we went home, to find the library deserted and an absence of spirit in the air. This was sufficiently remarkable, but on passing through to the parlor the phenomenon became more pronounced; there were the guests, elbowing one another at the door, craning their necks, standing a-tiptoe, and making the most surprising contortions in their endeavor to peep over one another's shoulders into the room. There was Cram, a tall, fishy-eyed youth with a milky way of pipe across his chin, who by his superior height had managed to stretch himself over the heads of two or three others with his eye glued to the crack in the door and would have been forced away; while little Donny, known as "Little Fauntleroy," a name bestowed in recognition of his lack of profanity, had dragged a chair from the library and was standing in it completely absorbed in the scene within.

They fell away as we came up, looking rather sheepish, and Cram (who had to be dragged away by his coat-tails) immediately seized Harold by the hand. He had a mark on his forehead where he had pressed it against the door, and his eyes were quite watery and blinking from the strain he had subjected them to.

"Say," he said, shaking hands violently, "Portal, my congratulations, you know, and that sort of thing. For your returns, and all that. But look here confound it, Portal,

us chaps a new deal here, can't you? I give you my word I've had my eye to that crack a blessed half-hour and old Cressey ain't moved a leg. Confound his nerve, wasn't we asked here, too? We didn't sneak in, did we?" asked Cram, bitterly. "We walked in the front door, didn't we, under the impression that we were guests? We may, of course, have mistaken the house," continued Cram, with cutting sarcasm, "but we *thought* we were walking into Syd's and with the expectation of mingling with the other guests. If we had known——"

"What's the matter?" asked Harold, good-naturedly, pushing toward the door. "What's the attraction here, anyway?"

"You can see for yourself," returned Cram, with strong feeling. "There's old Cressey had her over there in the corner laying himself out ever since she came, and no one else has had a chance to even be introduced. This sort of thing may be etiquette——"

I think I knew her before Harold. She was seated on a divan talking with Mr. Cressey with her back to the door, but she turned her head as we came in and the next moment rose and stepped toward us with outstretched hands. It was Starbright! Tall and beautiful, her rich brown hair arranged on top of her graceful head like a tiara, its single jewel a rose, her white shoulders gleaming through a network of lace, it was Starbright, holding both my hands in hers and giving me her cheek to kiss! She had been quick to see that for the briefest part of a second Harold didn't know her, but he was as quick recovering himself, and when she laughingly charged him with it he was audacious enough to say, in a low tone and with a meaning glance: "Is it likely I would show that I knew you when another man was kissing your cheek?" Which was very clever for Harold. But why should she blush when he kissed her? She hadn't when I did—but probably she had just noticed those gaping chaps at the door, confound them!

And here was Mr. Walpole coming in the door, arm in arm with Mr. Sydenham! And as our host laughingly swept the expectant crowd at the door into the room, and presented them one by one to Starbright, our old friend came straight to us. He was of course much changed. He was an old man, but though his shoulders were bowed and his face deeply lined, it was with suffering that had passed and had left only these outward marks; his eye was clear, and when he spoke it was the voice we knew.

"I have such good accounts of you both," he said, with his hands still on our shoulders, "that I suppose I shall have to forgive you. Eh? I must do it while I have any choice left—my authority will be gone by midnight over this young man." He was looking at Harold and smiling. "Twenty-one, eh? That makes you how much, Sumner?"

"Nineteen, sir."

"I thought so; we shall be able to keep you under our thumbs for a little while yet—a little while." I thought a sigh escaped him as he repeated the words in a low tone, almost as if he were speaking to himself. "Come!" he said, walking with us over to the window recess. "Confess we surprised you!"

"Completely," I answered, laughing, "but I think we heard something of you, too, this afternoon, but we didn't suspect it at the time."

Harold looked up quickly and Mr. Walpole followed the glance that passed between us. "Eh?" he said. "We only reached here this afternoon; how did we betray ourselves?"

"'Boatman, I'll give thee a silver pound to row us o'er the ferry,'" I quoted, laughing.

He slapped his leg and laughed heartily. "Lord!" he said, "that was to have been a secret forever! How in the world did you stumble onto that?"

We told him and he had another good laugh, and in turn Harold asked how they happened to choose that means of coming across the river.

"Why," he replied, "it was Starbright's idea. You wrote her—one of you—was it you, Sumner, who wrote her that you came across on that boat at the end of that interesting trip of yours? No? Then it was Harold." Harold looked at me in some confusion, laughed, and said he probably had written her an account of it. "One of you did," resumed Mr. Walpole, "and when we got into East St. Louis this afternoon nothing would do but we must hunt up that boat and taste one of Sumner's experiences. Starbright is rather given to sentiment on occasion, but I must say I enjoyed it, myself. Still, she would have been much better pleased, I have no doubt, if we had been penniless, too, God bless her heart! It's a wonder she didn't want to leave the train and ride on the cowcatcher." And again he laughed and slapped me on the back.

I think I must have shown my pleasure too plainly, but I couldn't help it. Starbright had remembered! She had wanted to cross the river as I had crossed it! Her notch was carved on the beam beside mine!

"Come," said Harold, crossly, "are we going to let those chaps have Starbright all to themselves? I'll bet a dollar that cheeky Cram there is asking to take her in to dinner this minute—look at him smirk!"

But that honor was reserved for Harold himself and was publicly announced by Mr. Sydenham to save further dispute, and everybody applauded and Starbright blushed very much and took his arm, and the rest of us marched in with what cheerfulness we could muster under these heartburning circumstances.

What a dinner that was! If Cram and those other fellows hadn't been there, *what* a dinner it would have been! Mr. Cressey we didn't mind so much; he minded his own business; but if Mr. Sydenham had given the rest of them a dollar apiece to go and dine at the Planters it would have been a much better arrangement all around. But as they *were* there, I have to record how Donny choked himself with



the wine at an early stage and had to be pounded on the back, a most degrading spectacle, certainly; how that insufferable Hinchley (our billing clerk) bored Starbright with a long story, he thought funny, about a dog he once owned that took a dislike to a Methodist preacher who came to settle in his town, and used to run between his feet every time he appeared on the street and upset him, and kept it up till the preacher, after numerous attempts to compass the dog's death, actually had to move out of town to get rid of the annoyance, and it was afterwards found that he had four wives in different parts of the country,—and the town bought the dog a gold collar, and how Starbright (who was too polite to show she was bored) laughed till the tears ran down her face; how Cram, presuming upon Starbright's acceptance of the olives from his hand, favored her with his attentions the rest of the evening, obtruding himself at one moment with the pickles, and at another with the cheese, and making himself generally offensive; how Donny had the poor taste to thrust himself into notice again after his disgraceful exhibition of himself, and ask Starbright if she had ever been to Jefferson Barracks, and upon her replying in the negative, brazenly to volunteer to escort her, alleging acquaintance with the officers there; how everyone instantly and with one voice deprecated Jefferson Barracks in the strongest terms, and overwhelmed Donny and drove him into obscurity again; how we drank Harold's health, standing, and how he returned thanks, saying he was much obliged for our good wishes and hoped to fulfill our expectations of him and, incidentally, his own, intimating that he thought it highly probable that he should do both; how, the speechmaking once started, Mr. Sydenham called upon Mr. Cressey to respond to "The Office," and how, in responding, he said that if we all worked hard we might learn the business sometime and repay the firm for the trouble and expense it had been to on our account, that if we had started in washing the windows and sweep-

ing the floors, as he had done, we might even now know more than we did, and that after we had been there forty years, as he had, we might talk, but until then it would be, on the whole, more becoming in us to keep still and to let those talk who knew what they were talking about; how the slight embarrassment that succeeded these remarks was instantly dissipated and a tremendous enthusiasm produced by Starbright saying, with her brilliant smile, "Gentlemen, I beg to propose the health of our kind host," and how we drank it and followed it up with three cheers that shook the table; how Mr. Sydenham made her a gallant bow and said that he considered himself entitled, after that, to forget his sixty years and dispute with the young dog just turned twenty-one the honors of the evening, as he was prepared to challenge comparison with any man there present in the sum of individual happiness it had brought him; how we all went wild when Starbright acknowledged this compliment, first by touching her lips to her glass and then extending her hand for him to kiss; how Donny, in a frantic endeavor to force his way into prominence again, broke his wineglass pounding on the table; how Mr. Sydenham called upon me for a sentiment, and how I started to my feet with a sentiment on my tongue and forgot it while I was rising, and how I sat down again and remembered it as soon as I was in my chair, and started up again and forgot it as soon as I got on my feet; how I finally got hold of it, after repeating this performance four or five times, and said that it had been my privilege to learn the facts about a certain transaction which had assured to indigent travelers the means of crossing a certain river, which I would not more definitely describe than to say that it was the largest river on the American continent; that I myself was in a position (and I begged my friend across the table would not attempt to interrupt me, for I was determined to go on) to testify to the incalculable boon which that transaction (the full particulars of which I did not feel

at liberty to divulge) had conferred on the class of unfortunates hinted at, and how I stood there at that table (which I rapped with my knuckles) *to* testify to it, and how I was happy to look at the faces around that table (which I did, and some of them looked a good way off, and appeared to be in a mist) and thank God the time had come when I *could* thus publicly testify to it; and how I threw myself upon that company to say whether my friend across the table should not be made to sit down and hear me out; and how there was great applause at this point and great mystification, and Mr. Sydenham, laughing and protesting and blushing like a girl, was forced back in his chair; and how I went on and said that while good deeds were their own reward, it was not always so happily vouchsafed to the doers thereof to be gifted with a faith to see that reward in every good fortune that befell them, as it had been to the individual to whom I referred, and that it was a still rarer spectacle to see the recipient of such good fortune, in the thankfulness and completeness of his faith, seeking always to divide it with those whom he believed to be the unconscious cause of it; and how it was happily *my* good fortune that night to stand there at that table (which I again rapped with my knuckles) and inform that individual, who sat within the sound of my voice, that, whatever foundation there might be for his happy faith in the luck that never failed to follow whenever a poor unfortunate availed himself of the means I had hinted at of crossing the river I had alluded to (and I hoped, for the sake of human nature in general, that there *was* foundation for it), there could be no doubt that in one very recent instance which I had in mind that faith had been signally justified; that that very afternoon, not one, but two passengers (though happily not of the unfortunate class) had been added to the long list of beneficiaries of the institution he had provided, and how I must again pause to throw myself upon the company to say whether our fair guest should

be suffered to bribe me with her eyes not to disclose the identity of those passengers, and how there were cries of "No! No!" (one, especially loud, from Donny, who had begun to stutter), and how I went on and said that, whereas there must ordinarily be more or less of conjecture in determining the exact source of any particular piece of good fortune it was desired to give credit for, we were not in this case under a similar doubt, since I had the pleasure of informing them all, while thanking them for their kind attention, that we had that good fortune with us that night in the presence of our fair guest and her excellent father, and here was to them, God bless them both! How my remarks created a most terrific sensation (though only a few, of course, understood their application), and how, amid the cheering and handclapping and drinking of the toast, Mr. Sydenham, in a state of inarticulate delight, wonder, breathless excitement, and, it must be supposed, temporary irresponsibility, deliberately seized Starbright and kissed her flat, and then shook hands with Mr. Walpole for ten minutes at a stretch; how a look of anguish came into all our faces at the sight, and how Starbright, looking all the prettier for it, shook her finger warningly at me to let me know she would get even; how Frank said he'd be hanged if he knew I had so much gab, and let's go off somewhere and have a smoke; how when the clock struck twelve we all joined hands round the table (except Donny, who had gone out in a hurry when Mr. Sydenham kissed Starbright, and could now be seen through the window in the moonlight resting his forehead against the brick wall), and sang *Auld Lang Syne* till we became quite affected and wholly forgot, I suppose, that we should all see one another again in the morning.

I was surprised, during the general hunt for hats and coats, to see that Mr. Cressey made no preparation for going, but sat quietly in his chair; and when the others were gone, quite gone,—they had come back three times and sang

some kind of weird chant under the window, of which nothing was distinguishable save the refrain at the end of each of seven verses, which was a plea to come

"and nestle on this shou-*holder*, oh—"

Mr. Sydenham led the way into the library, where Mr. Cressey immediately sat up to the table and began to pull papers and documents out of his pocket, and pinch himself together on the edge of his chair, quite as if he were starting in the day's work on his own stool at the office.

And now Starbright drew Harold and me down beside her on the great leather sofa and held our hands in hers; and how beautiful she looked in the soft glow of the shaded lamps, the deep paneled walls reflecting dimly on their polished surface the wavering figures of us all! Mr. Cressey, with the light shining on his bent face and all the rest of him, save his shirt bosom and his busy hands, in the shadow; Mr. Sydenham and Mr. Walpole bending over him on either side of his chair, their own faces looking up at them from the shadowy depths of the polished table; Frank in the armchair, waiting for a chance to smoke.

"And did you never once think," whispered Starbright, "that we should come?"

"I was never so certain of it as I was that I should come to you!" returned Harold, bending toward her.

"What! After all these years?"

"I was only waiting for them," returned Harold, soberly. "I am a man now, Starbright; I can do what I will. 'All these years' have done that much for me, but I hope in bringing me this privilege they have taken none from me that I used to claim?"

"There is said to be a law of compensation," said Starbright, smiling, "but we can not always follow its operations. There is problem number one for your new manhood. You see, Sumner, the penalties of age."

"They are heavy," I answered, "but only, you know, for those who fail. They are problems first, as you have said, and only become penalties when we fail to solve them. Looked at in that way Harold has nothing to be discouraged at, I think."

"I think," said Starbright, doubtfully, "that is what Miss Chessy would call an epigram. Did you see it in a copy-book anywhere?"

"No," I said, laughing.

"Then it wasn't said by a witty Frenchman. You know at boarding-school they take those beautiful moral sentiments out of the writings of French authors and put them in copy-books, but when you ask to get their works from the library Miss Chessy says they're not fit to be read."

Mr. Cressey selected a paper from his pile and handed it to Mr. Sydenham. "This is the balance sheet, Mr. Cressey?" asked that gentleman, quite loudly, taking it in his hand.

"Yes, sir," replied the clerk.

"I think," said Harold, thoughtfully, "I could not do better than to pursue my studies of the operations of this law of compensation under a pupil of Miss Chessy's."

"Sh-sh!" said Starbright.

"Although the hour is late, Portal," said Mr. Sydenham, turning to us with the paper in his hand and slightly clearing his throat, "your guardian and I have thought it a fitting time, following the pleasant events of the evening and while we are all of us together here, to apprise you in a few words of the present disposition of the inheritance you have this day legally come into."

In the silence Harold raised his eyes to Mr. Sydenham's face and regarded him steadily. A slight smile parted his lips, but he did not speak.

"It remains with you, of course," continued Mr. Sydenham, briskly, "to alter this disposition or not, as it shall meet your judgment and inclinations; it was made in

accordance with what appeared, at the time, to be your best interests. I have asked Mr. Cressey to draw off a balance sheet showing the condition of our books and the accrued profits. This is it; you will probably not care to look it over to-night, but I will hand it to you and ask you to go through it to-morrow at your leisure."

Harold took the paper and held it in his hand without looking at it. For an instant his eye had swept over my face as he stretched out his hand for it, but now he was looking steadily at Mr. Sydenham again and, I thought, slightly shaking his head.

"Have you no curiosity," asked Mr. Sydenham, smiling, and pointing at the folded paper, "to know the meaning of that paper? I assure you it cost Mr. Cressey a deal of work."

"Why, I suppose so," answered Harold, frowning and then laughing in his petulant, impatient way. "What *does* it mean?"

"It means," said Mr. Sydenham, rubbing his hands delightedly—and he had scarcely been able to restrain himself till Harold asked the question—"it means—bless my soul—what an old fool I am! I wish I had your command of feeling, sir—it means that you have been a partner in my house for two years! Confound you, sir, give me your hand!"

He seized it and shook it warmly. "I congratulate you, my boy, I congratulate you as honestly as if I were not, as I happen to be, the senior partner. Damme, sir, I'll *be* honest and say so, you're to *be* congratulated!"

There was a dead silence. Harold and I, our hands clasped in Starbright's lap, turned our faces toward each other; my own I am willing to believe reflecting only the pride I felt in him, the joy and thankfulness that were in my heart for this well-deserved fortune that had come to him at last; his, set, unmoved, but with a kindly light in his eyes, too, that was meant, I knew, for me. Frank



"Sh-sh!" said Starbright.

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whistled softly and sat up in his chair. Mr. Sydenham and Mr. Walpole executed a secret handshake behind Mr. Cressey's back, Starbright looking at Harold and smiling. Mr. Cressey was methodically arranging his papers in little piles under the lamp.

"Of course," said Mr. Sydenham, coming out from behind Mr. Cressey's chair with an air of being greatly refreshed, "of course it will occur to you now, young gentlemen, that I lost no time in communicating with Mr. Walpole the day you turned up here a couple of runaways, and looking, Miss Walpole," he said, addressing Starbright, and laughing, "very different from the way they look to-night, I assure you."

Starbright laughed and pressed our hands. "I don't doubt it," she said. "I've inspected the accommodations aboard the *Natchez*."

Mr. Sydenham beamed again at this happy allusion and for a moment seemed inclined to consider it provocative, but restrained himself and went on, after shaking his finger warningly at Starbright not to tempt him too far. "The correspondence which ensued between Mr. Walpole and myself (Mr. Cressey has it here; you may find it interesting to look over later) brought about in the end results little anticipated at the start. It is only necessary for me to refer, in a word, to certain unfortunate investments into which Mr. Walpole had been led, the failure of which not only wrecked his own fortune, but swept away funds of which he was the trustee under the will of his late partner, to say that I was early made aware of this calamity. I was made aware of the heroic struggle which he made to restore that trust, and of his setting out, though at an age when most of us are willing to step aside into the quieter paths of life, for a foreign land, the scene of his early successes, to achieve that end, now his one purpose in life. I was made aware, as time went on, of the steady and gratifying success of that struggle, and two years ago

I had the satisfaction to know that not only was his main object accomplished, but that he was in a fair way to repair his personal loss, and if I have not already congratulated you, my dear sir," said Mr. Sydenham, again retiring behind Mr. Cressey's chair and violently shaking Mr. Walpole's hand, "permit me to do so now. A noble struggle, my dear sir, a noble struggle!"

"I am—really—excess—ively obliged to you, Mr. Sydenham," returned Mr. Walpole, gasping under the energy of that gentleman's felicitation, "and deeply affected, I assure you."

"About this law of compensation," whispered Harold, bending closer to Starbright, "can you tell me——"

"Sh—sh!" whispered Starbright.

"It was at this time, Portal," continued Mr. Sydenham, emerging again, all in a glow, and bathing his hands in it with great enjoyment, "it was at this time that we went very thoroughly into the question of reinvesting your inheritance with a view not alone to the income it should bring you, but in such a way that it should open up for you, at the same time, a business career in which you should be well advanced by the time the conduct of your affairs should come into your own hands. The outcome of that discussion was that your guardian was good enough to leave it to the report which I should be able to make, after a stated time, of the progress you were making here and of the inclination you should show for the cotton business, to determine whether that investment should be made in my house. The report I was able to make, I am glad to say, was favorable to that disposition of the question, and at the conclusion of an investigation which I requested Mr. Walpole to have made for him of my financial condition, which proved satisfactory to him, the investment was made. It has shown, I am happy to say, a continuous profit ever since. The paper which you hold in your hand, which your guardian has already gone over with me, will show you the present con-

dition of that investment, which to-day becomes yours. I believe," concluded Mr. Sydenham, glowing more and more, and pulling out his handkerchief to rub his face and head, as if he had been in all over and found it most refreshing, "I believe that is all for which it is absolutely necessary to keep young people out of bed any longer to-night. Portal, your hand again; damme sir, I repeat it, you're to *be* congratulated. Frank, the new junior!"

Harold sustained the tremendous blow which Frank gave him between the shoulders, and pulling that enthusiast down beside him on the sofa held him there with his disengaged hand, and looked around at the faces before him with that slight smile still on his own. At Mr. Sydenham's red, beaming and expectant; at his guardian's deep-lined, but quiet and kindly, restfully observant in the subdued light; at Mr. Cressey's knotted and immovable over the papers under his nose.

"I am as glad to learn of Uncle Rand's success," he said, in his straightforward way, "as I possibly could be. I am glad for him and I am glad for—the heir. As for the partnership business, it's certainly a surprise—and it's an equally great honor, I'm sure—but its announcement comes a little ahead of time, I think, though it's just as gratifying. Sumner's not twenty-one, you know."

"Well?" said Mr. Walpole, smiling.

"Well, Sumner's the heir, not I, you know."

"No, I don't know that," replied Mr. Walpole, still smiling and shaking his head. "The announcement would be premature, I am aware, if we were making it to Sumner, but we're making it to you—to-night. We didn't intend to make any premature announcements to Sumner, but we shall have to if you compel us."

"Uncle Rand," answered Harold, laughing, "I won't fence with you. You know what I mean; I've seen a will of my stepfather's which left everything to his nephew, who sits here."

Mr. Walpole nodded, "I've seen that will too; in fact I have it in my pocket," and he tapped his coat.

"Not this one, you haven't," replied Harold, still laughing in his guardian's smiling face; "for I saw Sumner tear it up and chuck it into the Atlantic Ocean."

"A copy, yes; a copy which the individual from whom you got it made—with a good deal of care, no doubt,—for his own purposes. But the original, as I said, I have in my pocket, and you are quite right in stating its purport—it does leave everything to Sumner, who sits there. Unfortunately for Sumner, however, it is only valuable as a curiosity, showing the uncertain workings of the testator's mind, for I have another will in this pocket," and he tapped the other side of his coat, "which completely invalidates it. It is that will which we are trying—with a good deal of difficulty, it seems—to execute to-night."

"You haven't any more wills about you anywhere, have you?" asked Harold, very red.

"Oh, yes," replied Mr. Walpole, cheerfully, "I have still another in *this* pocket, but that's invalid too, now. *That* one left everything to you."

How loudly the clock ticked! I hadn't heard it before, but now it was the only sound in the room. And why did everyone look at me and smile. Mr. Sydenham was taking another glow bath and washing himself toward *me* this time; Mr. Walpole was tugging at his mustache and tugging it toward *me*; even Mr. Cressey looked up and scratched his nose with a paper, and scratched it at *me*! Suddenly the clock seemed to stop again; Harold was saying something.

"Hold on a minute! This is a trifle confusing. First, you say you have a will that leaves everything to Sumner, but that it's now invalid?"

Mr. Walpole nodded.

"Then you have a will that leaves everything to me, but now *that's* invalid?"

Mr. Walpole nodded again.

"Then you have a will—the last presumably, since you are putting it into effect—which also is in my favor, notwithstanding the fact that the former will which left everything to me is invalidated by this one?"

And again Mr. Walpole nodded.

"Then—then do I understand," asked Harold, "that it is only *part* of the will which becomes effective to-day?" For the first time his voice had lost his calm and sounded queer and rapid, and he seemed to be out of breath.

"Only a part of it."

"Then—then I don't inherit the whole estate?"

"Only half of it."

Harold leaned over suddenly and kissed Starbright on the cheek. "Why, then," he said, in his old good-natured way, and without a trace of perturbation, "he wasn't half a bad sort. I beg your pardon, Uncle Rand, for forcing you to tell so much. I won't ask you anything more. I accept my inheritance; I'll go over these papers with you to-morrow, Mr. Sydenham."

"I'm afraid," said Mr. Walpole, laughing, "you have forced me to tell too much to stop now. I'll never be able to get up any sort of surprise out of what you've left me."

"All right, then," cried Harold, gayly, "we'll make an end. This is like one of those chess problems where White mates in two moves. Shall I make 'em? Very well. Move number one: When do the remaining provisions of this will go into effect?"

"In about two years."

"Move number two: When who comes of age?"

"Sumner, who sits there."

Well, I knew Harold was shaking one of my hands and Mr. Walpole the other, that the others were waiting their turn, and that Frank was sustaining himself meanwhile by pounding me on the back and delivering me lunges in the chest, but I was thinking of how my mother used to put her elbows on the table in the old parlor back of the bookshop,

rest her chin on her hands, and say: "Bermondsey, mark my words, there's a will in Sumner's favor hidden somewhere, and it's probably back of the wainscoting or in the chimney, and if *I* were a man I'd find it if I had to *eat* my way to it!" A declaration that my father always felt constituted a personal indictment against him and in two counts, he being a man and not having eaten his way to it. But the reality became more plain when Starbright, taking her turn, put her arms around me and gave me a rousing kiss.

And now everyone seemed to be particularly happy and satisfied with the outcome except Mr. Cressey, who was tying up his papers with an indignant air and snorting to himself because no one had read one of them or showed the least interest in them.

"But even now I don't see," said Harold, his mind beginning to return to its practical workings when the excitement had died down a little, "how this extraordinary collection of wills kept turning up with the wrong one always uppermost."

"Oh, dear!" cried Starbright, clapping her hands and pouting, "don't let's have a lot of horrid explanations to spoil everything! I hate explanations; besides which they're inartistic."

Mr. Walpole smiled at her and patted her cheek. "We all dislike explanations—particularly when they're long—and no doubt they're inartistic as you say, but they are sometimes necessary. So I'll make one. As you know," he continued, more seriously, and looking round at us as we gathered round the table—the shaded lamp in the center throwing a ring of light at whose edge we stood like ghostly conspirators—"as you know, I was for many years before his death the confidential partner of Richard Sumner, whose numerous testaments have been the cause of so many unhappy complications. Mr. Sumner's oft-declared intention to make me his administrator, and the many confidential conversations that passed between us respecting the pro-

visions of his will, had impressed me with the belief, long before his death, that his property would be left entirely to his nephew, Sumner Bibbus. He had many times expressed that intention to me in so many words. The death of his wife and the fact that he had never shown any special interest in his stepson—not even permitting him to assume his name—left me no room to doubt, at the time of his own death, that he had executed that intention. I was therefore astonished beyond measure when an examination of his papers disclosed a will leaving everything to his stepson, Harold Portal. I was named administrator, as I had expected, and the provisions of the instrument were somewhat peculiar; they were, briefly, that the testator's share in the business which we had conducted together should be transferred to me at a figure—which was there named—that we had previously agreed upon as equitable; that all his other investments should be withdrawn at the same time and that the whole proceeds should constitute a trust fund which I was required to re-invest immediately, but in such form that the principal should revert to me again after a period of six years, for re-investment in still another form, to run a further period of six years, when a third change should be made and the principal employed in new channels until the will was settled. The secret of this remarkable provision for short-term investments lay in certain eccentricities and prejudices of the testator's which I need not enter into, but which I may say never placed a very flattering value on the motives or integrity of his fellow men. The provisions of the will were carried out, and as the restrictions imposed by its peculiar requirements with respect to employing the funds in my hands barred the most conservative and reliable forms of investment, I had some difficulty in executing my trust in a manner approved by my own judgment, both in the first instance and at the later periods. From the first I had been troubled by haunting doubts as to whether there might not be another will, but the most diligent search failed



to reveal it or any scrap of evidence even that Mr. Sumner had ever contemplated a different disposition of his property, and as time went on I came to think no more about it."

Mr. Walpole paused here and remained silent a moment with his hands resting on the table before him, and when he began again it was in a lower voice, and his eyes, which had before sought all our faces, now rested upon Starbright's and never left it till he had finished.

"At the period when I was to make the final disposition of my trust, circumstances had transpired to present an investment which held out the greatest promise. It had some of the best names in Boston back of it but it had—what no one could foresee—the greatest scoundrel as well. I went into it. I not only put the trust money into it but I put all my own. For a while everything went well; then came the financial panic which you will all remember, with its failures and tumblings of values everywhere; the house through which I had invested stood bravely and would have weathered it but for the rascality of the person to whom I have referred, and it would have withstood that but for the panic; together they brought it down, and the happiness of many a family with it."

Again the speaker paused. There had come a change over his face, a change indescribable, incapable of analysis, but it was as if all those old lines of suffering that furrowed his cheeks, which had been like the cold, dead scars of a burned-out volcano, had been lit up again with fresh fires; they became alive and spoke, touched with the wand of bitter memory. Starbright put out her hand and laid it softly on his arm. He started, put his hand on hers, and smiled into her gently questioning eyes; and the suffering faded out of his wounds and the stirred fires flickered down again into their dead, gray ashes.

"It was at this time, when the worry and suspense of this impending calamity had racked and shaken me to the verge of collapse,—and no man can know, who has not

gone through the experience, what the mental torture is that brings a man, conscious of his own integrity, to a condition where he starts at his own shadow and is afraid of his own thoughts,—it was at this time that a fresh blow fell, so sudden, so unexpected, and threatening such terrible consequences to me and mine, that in my then condition it completely prostrated me and reduced me to the pitiful state which those who were about me then will, I hope, be willing to forget. It was a letter informing me of the discovery of a new will, in which a new heir and a new trustee were named. I never doubted its truth; it confirmed all my old suspicions; and in the condition I then was, I was as incapable of defending my own integrity and the rights of my ward as I was of taking hope from the character of the writer and his obvious purpose. These were soon disclosed. The writer was the miserable, scheming attorney whom Sumner knew, and his object was blackmail. Nevertheless, when he disclosed his identity as a former clerk in Mr. Sumner's employ—and I recalled him perfectly—and claimed that he was himself a witness of the sealing of the will which he had unearthed, after years of search, I was convinced of the genuineness of his find, and realized what its production at that moment might mean for me. Collusion with the blackmailer, complicity in the frauds which were revealing themselves in the affairs of the mining company I had invested in, suppression of the genuine will—any of these things might be charged against me. The wretchedness, the fear, the agony I suffered during those days, hounded by this man Hynson and consumed by the slow suspense that attended the struggle of that house to which I had pinned my last hope—a hope that sank hour by hour,—will never be known. At last the final blow fell, that house closed its doors, the frauds and their author stood revealed; more I was spared, for a merciful unconsciousness followed the shock and for days and weeks I knew no more. I have no right to speak of my sufferings.

Thank God they are passed. Thank God I find so much about me to-day to be happy and thankful for.

"When I recovered from my long sickness, and viewed with a clear and strengthened mind the wreck of my fortunes and hopes, I saw but one duty before me, and that was to go to this man Hynson, obtain and proclaim the genuine will, and devote the rest of my days to restoring the trust I had sacrificed, and turn it over to the heir who had been all these years dispossessed. I sought Hynson—he was gone from the bookshop where he had lived since I had come to know him. I sought him further and found him—in a madhouse. I pass over the innumerable delays that intervened before I could get possession, through due legal process, of the few miserable belongings in the bookshop; I succeeded at last, and with very little trouble found the document I was in search of, which had been hidden, with a madman's cunning, in the wall of a curious vault or excavation under the sidewalk. It was a will, genuine apparently, leaving everything to Sumner there; it bore a date later by three months than the will under which I had been acting as administrator all these years, and it was properly witnessed and signed, and named Sumner's father as administrator. It was, in fact, the original of that document which Sumner threw into the sea. And now but for an accident, so curious that it sounds like the embellishment of an Oriental tale, that will would have been placed in Mr. Bibbus's hands without an hour's delay, and Sumner here would now be in expectation of inheriting in whole a property one-half of which he has just seen handed over to another. As soon as I had examined the paper, I stepped to the door and called into the room the occupant of the adjoining shop—he was an upholsterer, I believe—with the intention of asking him to witness a memorandum I should make, setting forth the finding of the document, the place, hour, etc.; and picking up at random one of the books with which the floor was littered—it proved

to be a volume of Cæsar's *Commentaries*—started hastily to tear out a fly-leaf to write on. As I did so I noticed, with surprise, that the back cover of the book was very much thicker than the front, a difference that was not apparent when the volume was closed, and on taking hold of it with my thumb and fingers and bending it, became aware that one of the blank leaves next to the binding had been carefully pasted down to it by the edges, forming a sort of pocket in which it was plain some object had been inserted. The discovery did not at first suggest anything important to me, but the man I had summoned entering the room at this instant, while my fingers still rested on the sealed-up page, a sudden impulse caused me to lay the volume before him, and explaining in a few words that I was conducting a search for a valuable paper and that I desired him to witness what I was about to do, quickly ran my pen-knife around the sealed edge of the leaf, tore it off, and disclosed a folded paper secreted there! I seized it and spread it out on the counter. It was the last will and testament of Richard Sumner, dated only three days before his death and witnessed by his household servants whose names were perfectly familiar to me! I thanked my witness as unconcernedly as I could, we both made a written note of the circumstances, and he went away, leaving me to examine the document in detail. It divided the property equally between Harold Portal and Sumner Bibbus, making me the sole executor and the guardian of both heirs."

"Whoop!" cried Frank, so suddenly and with such vigor that we all started—so absorbed had we been in the recital—and then laughed at this vibration of our own nerves.

"That probably expresses the state of my own feelings at the time," said Mr. Walpole, smiling. "You now know everything. That the man Hynson, by his prying and prowlings had guessed at the hiding-place of the missing will, you, Sumner, who know of his coming to lodge over

your father's shop and of his finally securing possession of his stock, have doubtless surmised; but having found one will it never occurred to him to look for another, and it remained for me to make the discovery. It has always seemed to me," said Mr. Walpole, in a low voice, "that there was a kind of Providence in it. The will remained in hiding just long enough to defeat the purpose of the man who had spent years of his life, and finally his reason, searching for it, and then came to my hand when I had conquered a terrible temptation to keep silent and let the secret die with the madman who had schemed over it—came as a blessing and a deliverance, leaving me still the legal custodian of the trust and the time to achieve my purpose of restoring it."

"I propose that we all drink Mr. Walpole's health!" cried Frank, in a businesslike manner.

"And then go to bed," added Starbright, laughing.

"And get up in the morning and invoice a cargo that has to be aboard by ten o'clock sharp," added Mr. Cressey, severely.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### THE CAPTAIN SHOTS—AND MISSES

NEVERTHELESS, *I* didn't help invoice any cargoes the next morning, nor did Harold. In fact, Mr. Cressey himself was fourteen and a half minutes late at his desk by the testimony of every watch in the office—fourteen and three-quarters by Donny's, but Donny had lost prestige since his Jefferson Barracks proposal of the night before, and his timepiece carried no weight. There were eight clerks in the office, and as the door opened and Mr. Cressey appeared, eight watch-cases snapped down and were returned to their eight pockets, and eight pairs of eyes that had been fastened on the door hastily sought the desks of their respective owners; but comparisons were made later and the damning evidence unanimously rendered—fourteen and a half minutes.

It will readily be believed that my first thought after recovering from my astonishment and wonder at these tremendous happenings (which took me three or four days), was to apprise my father and mother of my good fortune. I wrote them a long letter which I considered to be quite a model of clear and concise statement until I read it over, when I had to admit that it seemed to be mostly about Starbright, which was very surprising as I hadn't been conscious of it before; so I tore it up and wrote another which turned out to be mostly about Harold, and in the end I threw all attempt at explanation to the winds, and wrote: "What do you think! Mr. Walpole is here, and says Uncle Sumner left me half his fortune, and I'm to have it when I'm twenty-one!" But even then I added a

postscript which contained this information: "His daughter is with him; she has grown very tall."

But after all my labor was wasted; I never mailed my letter, for I received one from my mother that very day which changed my plans completely.

"My dear boy," she wrote, "you may recall that upon the occasion of your recent visit I spoke to you about a certain delicate matter I had in hand, the object of which was to effect a reconciliation between a personage of some local celebrity—whom I will designate as the General, though his real title is below that rank, but you will understand whom I refer to—and his wife. You will be glad to learn that my endeavors have been highly successful and that the wife (in regard to whom I believe I made the remark to you that you might safely trust me to read her heart), the wife (whom I believe you will have no difficulty in identifying under the circumspect designation of Mrs. P.), the wife (after a violent scene with the human Vulture whom the irony of Fate and misdirected social usage compel her to address by the appellation of Father), has announced her intention of immediately joining the General here. The General, with an ardor for which I had failed to give him credit, has made every preparation for her reception. He has taken the house next the Popplewicks' on our street,—you may recall a house half a block above our own standing somewhat back from the street, painted red with white trimmings and with a tower on one corner,—it was originally built by Alf Hutchins who was in the liquor business, and who moved away and went to Arkansas, where his daughter Lucie married a member of the Legislature and was said to be very devoted to him, poor girl, visiting him constantly in the Penitentiary, and later was occupied by the Martins, who complained that it was draughty—owing probably to the cellar being constructed above ground—and they moved out to take the

house next to Cusack's, on Poplar Street; I think you must recall the house, anyway the General has taken the house immediately opposite this, and had it completely furnished. Perhaps he would have done better to have waited and allowed Mrs. P. to select the carpets herself, or at least have consulted the judgment of someone who might reasonably be supposed to possess more information, and perhaps I may add, taste, on the subject of carpets than any man could be expected to possess, especially a man whose abilities are almost wholly technical, whether viewed from a military or a royal-flush standpoint. However, I would be the last one to obtrude *my* views unasked, but I *will* say this much—that if there is any wife whose heart I can trust myself to read that wife is Mrs. P., and that I will here venture the prediction that before she has been here a week those carpets will *come up*, and if one comes up before another I will venture the further prediction that it will be the one in the dining-room.

"Mrs. P. is to start next Monday, and the General has planned to leave here Tuesday night to meet her when she arrives in St. Louis, whence they will proceed here together. His absence will give us an opportunity to provide a little housewarming for them, and we thought (your father and I) that it would be very agreeable to all concerned if you could be one of those to welcome them. I write to say, therefore, that if you can come (without precipitating any crisis in the cotton market) the occasion promises unusual felicity; your father, Major Popplewick, and the Mayor have constituted themselves a Committee to meet the re-united couple at the train and escort them to the house, and I have taken it upon myself, with such assistance as Mrs. Cusack, Mrs. Popplewick, Mrs. Martin, Mrs. Pitkin, Mrs. Eckert, Mrs. Slade, and Mrs. Appleby can give me, to prepare a collation. The General showed some annoyance, I understand (and no wonder! I don't blame him), when he learned that the rather peculiar cir-



cumstances of his wife's coming were known to some extent about town, but what puzzles me is, how in the world did it get out? I never mentioned it to a soul except the few ladies I have named, and your father has taken no one into his confidence except the Major and Mayor Pitkin; I hope, my dear, you were not indiscreet enough to breathe a word to anyone? Of course, the General resented it chiefly on account of the distorted and exaggerated versions that gained currency at once, and because it was hinted that Ferringway's proposed to illuminate itself on her arrival—and it was thought that other demonstrations of a questionable nature might be looked for,—but on the General's causing it to be intimated that he should exact personal satisfaction from anyone who should attempt to put these arrangements into effect, they have been, it is thought, generally abandoned.

"We both hope that you will find no difficulty in coming down for this occasion, but your father expressly stipulates that you shall not jeopardize the interests of the house in any way if the condition of the market should be at all ticklish. It must be the house above everything, he says, and your mother is not the woman to say differently. With best regards to Mr. Sydenham, and trusting that the information which reaches us here of the promising outlook for the cotton crop in Arkansas may be agreeable to him, I close, hoping to see you on Tuesday. With love, your mother,

"FANNY.

"P. S.—You may be interested to learn that some remarks which your father addressed to you at the railroad station at the time of your departure, bearing upon the cotton situation, having been heard with great approval by a number of our people who happened to be gathered there at the time, he has been induced, at their urgent solicitation, to put them into the form of a pamphlet, which has just been issued and whose appearance has caused a great

deal of favorable comment through this section of the country. Its reception has determined him to immediately strike off five thousand copies and send them to Mr. Sydenham for his personal use, to be distributed gratis, where, and in such a manner as he shall determine, with a view to the best and most far-reaching effects in the cotton centers of this country and of Europe."

The receipt of this letter immediately determined me to go down to Pitmouth again and witness the happy consummation of the plans I had been the means of inaugurating, and on ascertaining from Mr. Sydenham that the condition of the market was auspicious, and excusing my hasty departure to our guests, prepared to set out on the Tuesday specified. At the last moment, and very much to my surprise, my guardian (as it was now my privilege to call him) asked permission to accompany me. He smiled at my astonishment at this proposal (though I was gratified, too) and pulled my ear.

"Do you suppose I came all the way from China merely to tell you of your good fortune?" he asked, banteringly. "By far the most important object of my coming was to see and consult with your father, who, I think, can be of the greatest assistance to me in a most important matter. Your going down gives me an excellent opportunity to see him under the happiest circumstances."

We reached our destination about noon and walked in on my father and mother just as they were sitting down to the midday meal. Was there ever such a bustle as then and there ensued? My mother, divided between relief at being caught with the best plates on and the gravest doubts as to whether the gravy would go round, was in such a state of alternating hope and uncertainty, complicated by darting thoughts ahead as to where she was to put us to sleep, and of the condition of the silk spread and the hair matress, that she didn't know at times which was Mr. Wal-

pole and which was I, and kept asking after my daughter to my great confusion, and once made my back turn cold by saying to Mr. Walpole that he ought to be ashamed of himself for not letting her know he was going to bring me so she could have had a tapioca pudding. However, the gravy turning out all right and her mind being easy in regard to cheese and coffee, she became more collected, and by the time the meal was over had acquired such a dignity and ceremoniousness that I believe she was secretly sorry that, in the light of experience, we couldn't begin all over again.

And then when Mr. Walpole, who had made himself irresistible during the meal and had quite won them both, I could see, plunged into the recital of my incredible and stupendous good fortune, *was* there ever such a look of amazed wonder and astonishment as appeared on my father's face, or such a calm, superior smile of intelligence as appeared on my mother's! My father sat with his palms spread out on his knees, his mouth open, and the top of his head quite flushed with excitement, gazing at Mr. Walpole and making futile attempts to ejaculate "Bless my soul!" without producing any sound whatever. My mother, with her arms folded, her head bent forward and slightly on one side, with that smile on her face, so knowing, so meaning, and at times so suspicious as absolutely to disconcert Mr. Walpole, who stammered, flushed guiltily, and stopped short to pick his words more than once, my mother nodding her head at such times in a significant manner as much as to say, "I understand, sir; I know what you have got to say as well as you do, and it will have to come out finally, no matter what evasions and subterfuges you may employ; go on, sir, go on!"—heard him through without taking her eyes from his face, except occasionally to dart a triumphant look at my father, which only had the effect of adding to his bewilderment and wonder; and when the speaker came to finding the will in the *Commentaries*,

how my father turned his round, wide eyes upon my face and made up his mouth for a tremendous whistle, which wouldn't come! And how my mother, gathering her brows and shaking her head, and smiling that suspicious knowing smile, said:

"H'm, in the *Commentaries*, eh?"

Mr. Walpole nodded, and rubbed his hands with some trepidation. "Pasted down between the back cover and the fly-leaf, ma'am, and most cunningly concealed, I assure you. The bulk was not at all noticeable when the book was closed. I suppose," he continued, turning to my father in a desperate attempt to get him into it, "I suppose you must have handled it a hundred times yourself, but you see it was just the way the volume happened to open when I took hold of it."

"Oh, I don't doubt you found it there," said my mother, tossing her head and giving a slight sniff, "but that was not its first hiding-place, by any means!"

"Eh!" said Mr. Walpole, astonished. "You knew where it was hidden?"

My mother looked around at us all and smiled calmly. "I believe," she said, "that both Bermondsey and Sumner have heard me say a hundred times, if not more, that that will be secreted either back of the wainscoting or in the chimney of Uncle Sumner's house. I will not say at this late day," said my mother, as if she might have given the information if applied to at an earlier date, "which place it was, but it was one of them. It may have been removed subsequently and placed where you found it, but it was not there at first; no, it was not there at first!" Shaking her head firmly, my mother threw herself back in her chair and looked around as if she would thank anyone to prove the contrary.

"Very likely, ma'am, very likely," said Mr. Walpole, glad enough to concede this point. "Indeed, it seems most plausible that Mr. Sumner should have become alarmed for its

safety and adopted this means of securing it, and too, don't you see, his leaving you his library had the effect of placing the will actually in your possession, he trusting doubtless to your discovering it upon an examination of your legacy."

"Well, well!" said my father, finding his voice at last, and beginning to rub his legs, and his palms, and the top of his head in his old way, "the main point is, it's found, and it leaves Sumner half, and Mr. Walpole's his guardian; well, well! It's scarcely to be believed, is it!"

"Of course it is to be believed!" said my mother, sharply. "There's nothing surprising about it, I hope. I'm not surprised, am I? Come, Bermondsey," said my mother, firmly, holding him to the point, "don't try to get out of it, for it's not like you; am I surprised or am I not?"

"Certainly *not*!" said my father.

"Thank you, Bermondsey," returned my mother, sweetly. "I knew I could rely upon your sense of justice. You are right, Bermondsey, I'm *not* surprised." And to show that she was not, my mother, who had forgotten all about me until now, threw her arms about me, kissed me a hundred times, and kept exclaiming between the volleys, "Who would have believed it! Whoever *would* have believed it!" and in the end becoming quite hysterical through joy, and laughter, and tears, just like an ordinary woman who had had the surprise of her life.

After the excitement was all over Mr. Walpole and my father went off to the *Clarion* office, arm in arm, leaving my mother and me to gaze at each other over the unwashed dishes a space and then joyfully to proceed to spend my legacy.

"And to think," said my mother, rubbing her nose indignantly, "that it was *your* money that creature with the woman's shoes ran off with and that it's *your* money the Boston gang are playing ducks and drakes with this minute in the Bald Knob!"

"Not now," I returned, gently. "Mr. Walpole, though he acted strictly within his rights when he made that unlucky investment, has chosen from a high sense of honor to replace the loss occasioned by Princep's theft. My inheritance is now safely invested elsewhere. If Mr. Walpole now succeeds in getting anything out of the Bald Knob (and I think he has some such ideas in mind) it will be his own."

My mother couldn't see this at first and was inclined to think I was entitled both to what had been put into the mining claim and all that my guardian had amassed in his eastern ventures, and I believe it was only the doubtful value of the former asset that finally induced her to relinquish it.

"You think," she asked, "that Mr. Walpole has some notion of interesting himself in the affairs of the Bald Knob?"

I nodded. "I imagine that is what brought him here. He knows Bermondsey was in Princep's employ, and it's my impression that's what he came to see him about."

"Then," said my mother, triumphantly, "he's come to the right party! Your father can talk Bald Knob to him till the cows come home—though perhaps," said my mother, checking herself, "a less pastoral simile would be more appropriate in a mining country like ours where the milk all comes from Kansas City in cans. However, I can tell Mr. Walpole *this* much: if he ever expects to do anything with the Bald Knob he's first got to get rid of the Boston gang. But he's made the right start, he's come to the right party; just let him read the Junius letters!"

I thought from the pleased expression on my father's face, when I got down to the office late in the day, that Mr. Walpole had been reading them. They had been in conference long enough for it, too; all the afternoon, Mat said, grumblingly; and a six months' contract for a patent medicine "ad" had got away because "the Kunnel wuz

so dern busy jawin' " he wouldn't come out to talk to the agent.

"Mr. Walpole," said my father, shaking hands with me in a corner while my guardian was watching Mat "kick her off" with great interest, "Mr. Walpole is one of the most intelligent men I ever met! He has a grasp, an insight, a—a cohesiveness of vision and a—er—resiliency of mind, if I may so express myself, truly remarkable. In the short time I have had to explain the matter to him, I believe he has acquired a more thorough understanding of the affairs of the Bald Knob Company than have the receivers themselves after three years of hopeless bungling. It's intellect, that's what it is," said my father, tapping his head significantly, "intellect and the—er—trained faculty of assimilation. When a man's got that he goes straight to the heart of a matter like a magnet to a loadstone; when he hasn't got it—pouf!" My father snapped his fingers in the air as if in that case he went up through the ceiling.

In truth I was as pleased as he was to see the intimate and cordial relations that had sprung up between them in so short a time. Mr. Walpole appeared to be no less satisfied than was my father. He was more like his old self that afternoon than I had seen him; his manner was animated, cheerful, even gay; his laugh was hearty, and more than once his face took on his old captivating humorous expression that had won my panicky heart on that never-to-be-forgotten day when he came to the bookshop for me.

"I am greatly pleased with your father, Sumner," he said to me, with his hand on my shoulder. "A man of great abilities, I can see. The man I have been looking for, I think. I'm glad I came; yes, I'm very glad, indeed, that I came." And seeing that they were both of one mind, I was glad he had.

I didn't see anything of the Captain during the day, though I took a stroll through the town and received the salutations of most of the other inhabitants, but after tea

my father proposed that we go down to the station and bid him Godspeed on his happy errand—as if he had been bound for the Sandwich Islands. Mr. Walpole excused himself on the plea of letter-writing, but promised to walk in that direction later in the evening and enjoy our company back; so toward train-time my father and I set out alone.

It was midsummer. The night was starry and calm. The thousand and one insect noises that always began there with the dusk, rose shrill and unvaried from every vacant lot as we made our way down the moonlit street. From a hall over the "Paris Emporium" came the scraping of a fiddle, the pounding of feet, and the gay laughter that told of a dance going on. From the top of the hill an intermittent flare of red shooting up into the sky showed where the Bald Knob furnaces were licking at the wealth of the hills. My father stopped once and gazed at it for a minute.

"It's spectacular," he said, "but the question is: is the show worth the money to the stockholders?" And this being one of the kind of questions that are spoiled by any kind of answer, I kept still.

The Captain was not at the station when we got there. A few restless beings had torn themselves away from home to come down and see the "Cannon Ball" come in, and were now sitting in a row on the edge of the platform swinging their legs, and discussing the probability of that projectile being late. To a question of my father's the reply was returned that Captain Parvin had not been seen there.

"Strange!" muttered my father, after we had walked up and down the long platform half a dozen times and he had looked at his watch at every turning. "He positively assured me he should go on this train; in fact, he sent down this afternoon and got his ticket. It's the last one that will get him there on time, and she's due in five minutes!" We took a couple more turns, and still the Captain did not appear.

"Come!" exclaimed my father, greatly perturbed. "He



mustn't miss this train; it will disarrange everything. Take a run up the street, Sumner, and see if he's coming. Go as far as Ferringway's; hurry, and I'll wait here."

I set off at a smart run the way we had come. For a considerable distance from the station the road was lined on either side by the steep and broken incline of the hill through which it had been blasted, and the jagged boulders protruding from the sides of the cut, threw their fantastic and distorted shadows into the roadway below. I kept in the middle of the road the better to command a view of these dark patches, and as I came to the curve I suddenly saw a figure slip quickly across a path of moonlight some distance ahead, and disappear again in the shadow at the side of the road. I was about to call out to ask if that were Captain Parvin when a second thought held my tongue. It could scarcely be he, for the figure was going away from the station toward town, and then something in its movement, which was stealthy and furtive, brought me to a stand with a sudden uncomfortable feeling. The next moment, scarcely knowing why, I had slipped into the shadow myself and ran on quickly. And because I was looking ahead, eagerly watching for a reappearance of the figure, I did not perceive an object in my path till my foot struck against it and I fell sprawling. I picked myself up and turned to see what I had stumbled over, for as my foot struck it I had felt that it was something soft and yielding. It had rolled over into the moonlight and I gazed at it with astonishment. It was a gentleman's valise. I picked it up quickly and examined it; it was quite heavy and evidently well filled, being firmly strapped. An ivory tag was attached to the leather handle; I turned it over and read the name, "George Parvin"!

I was now more than astonished; I was alarmed. What was the meaning of these things? The Captain failing to meet his train; his valise dropped in the road; the slinking figure in the moonlight? Had he met any harm? I looked

fearfully around, expecting I know not what; I could see no indications of a struggle, and one or two dark objects which I shudderingly approached turned out to be rocks and bushes. Somewhat reassured I hastily concealed the valise behind a rock a few feet from where I had found it and ran on, though my heart was now making almost as loud music as my feet on the hard road. I had not gone twenty yards when I stopped again and hastily crouched in the bushes, for only a few yards ahead of me, but on the opposite side of the way, the shadow of a man suddenly fell across the moonlit road, and as I looked the figure emerged from the shadow and ran ahead a few paces and stopped again behind a sheltering rock, and in that instant I plainly recognized the Captain's form! And now I was in a fever of excitement. I was positive the first figure I had seen, which was on my side of the road, had not crossed over; there could be but one explanation therefore for what I had seen—the Captain was following the first man! This cleared up the mystery of the valise; the Captain had doubtless been on the way to the train when he became aware of the other man, and leaving his valise where he was, had turned to track him. But for what purpose, and who was the mysterious figure ahead, whose actions had so plainly shown its fear of detection? In a moment I had forgotten all about my errand, intent on the mystery before me, and keeping well in the shadow and moving as the Captain moved, I worked along on my side of the road, determined to know the meaning of it, if possible. I could not, of course, see the man in front, owing to the uneven nature of the side of the cut with its jutting boulders and clumps of bushes, but the Captain evidently had him in view all the time, and I never lost sight of the Captain; and in this way the strange chase continued until it led to the plank sidewalk and darkened buildings of the main street. And here, the view being more exposed, the Captain fell back and waited in a doorway some minutes,

and I was obliged to dodge hastily around the rear of the blacksmith shop and wait in the shadow until I judged he had gone on. When I peeped cautiously out two or three minutes later he had, indeed, hurried on and was so far in advance that I had no hesitation about running after him boldly. A number of figures were now to be seen on either side of the street, and the usual crowd was hanging about Budlong's lighted windows, but the Captain had evidently marked his man well, for he held straight on past these, and, hanging on his heel once more for a brief second in the door of the butcher shop, shot suddenly across the street and plunged up Ferringway's stairs! At the same instant the long shriek of the "Cannon Ball's" whistle split the air and I knew that he would not go to St. Louis that night.

I was not a minute behind him. The swinging-door at the head of the stairs was still gently oscillating when I put my hand on it. A blaze of light, clouds of cigar smoke, and a low, steady hum of voices greeted my senses as I stepped inside. The place was crowded, nearly every table was occupied and a number of men were standing about watching the play of the sitters; and by mingling with these near the door I was able to sweep the room with my eyes while being comparatively free from observation myself. I was not long in discovering the Captain; he stood at the lower end of the room near the roulette table and seemed to be following the play, but as I watched I saw that his eyes were upon a single player there and that they never left him. I edged a little closer and soon identified the object of his scrutiny. It was a shabbily dressed man, above the average height, and the little I could see of him in profile, his back being turned toward me, except when he partly turned to follow his play, showed his face to be covered with a thick, untrimmed beard. The only other thing I noticed about him from where I stood, that, considering the way he was dressed, was at all exceptional,

was the exceedingly white and plump hand which he rested upon the table before him. I made no doubt this was the mysterious figure of the road.

I watched him and I watched the Captain. The latter never moved from his place, which was within a few feet of the unconscious player—indeed, he could have put out his hand and touched him—and never took his eyes from the other. I thought he was paler than was his wont, but there was nothing in his manner to indicate excitement, except perhaps that the end of the unlighted cigar he held in his teeth had twice been bitten off by the compression of his jaws within the few moments I had watched him. Not so calm was the player. It soon became evident that luck was against him, and as he lost, his nervousness and agitation became painfully plain. His white hand shook as it deposited his money, and though I could not see his face, the strained eagerness with which his eyes followed the dealer's movements could be too easily read in the tense posture of his body and the twitching of his shoulders, while the inevitable result of the run of luck against him was indicated by that last hopeless sign that gamblers know so well—the nervous and furtive fingering in his pocket of his last remaining coins.

Again he lost. The dealer swept in his winnings; the game was called again. One or two of the losers turned away with a laugh, refusing to tempt Fortune further, and their places were filled by others. But the man whom the Captain was watching stood still. One hand was in his pocket, the other plucked tremulously at his beard.

"Make your play, gentlemen!" cried the dealer, briskly.

The Captain's man hesitated no longer. He drew a twenty-dollar gold piece from his pocket and reaching over laid it on the square from which his last stake had been raked into the dealer's pile. It was the gambler's tribute to his superstition—luck. He lost—and the very next square to it paid twenty to one that deal!

For a moment he stood still, staring confusedly at the spot whence his stake had been swept away, then he turned and twitching his hat over his eyes started out, and as he walked he seemed to reel.

What was it made me start, as for an instant his face was turned full toward me? I did not know the man. There was nothing in those haggard and distorted features to stir any recognition in me, and yet as I caught that swift look in which fear, terror, rage, and despair combined to make that face one to fall away from and shudder at, what nameless feeling was it that came over me? Where had I seen that look—not the face, but the *look*—flashed over my head at something beyond me—at something dreaded, hoped against, yet expected—as this look flashed over me now toward the door? Was it in a crowded street—through a window——

Captain Parvin stepped in front of me and touched the man on the shoulder. He turned like a flash and they looked into each other's eyes. And then the face of the stranger had grown white with the whiteness that is painted only by the hand of Death. He raised his arm and backed away, but the Captain seized him by the wrist and, pulling him close up to him, said something in his ear. There had been no commotion, it was all the swift work of a second, but some few eyes had seen it, and I saw half a dozen men start to seize them at the instant when the Captain hurled the man to the floor, and stepped back a pace with his hand at his pocket; the next there was a quick sharp report, then another, followed by a rush of feet, and then someone cried out for them to stand back, and the ring widened, and from a chair I looked over into it and saw George Parvin lying dead upon the floor.

And then I saw the man who had killed him rise to his feet and stand cowering, his hat off, his hair and beard disheveled, his eyes bloodshot; I saw him look at the man he had killed and then at the stern faces about him, and his

own was still white with the whiteness that is painted only by the hand of Death. And then from somewhere in the crowd came a low exclamation, then a murmur as the word passed in a spreading ripple over the room; then a swelling blur of voices, with the quick turning of questioning faces this way and that, then a roar that shook the room, again and again, a roar that was the voicing of a hundred throats of one word, and that word a name, and that name:

"Princep!"

In the second before the rush began our eyes met, and I knew him then and he knew me, and I turned my face away, sick and dizzy. With wild yells and frantic curses the crowd charged upon him. Tables and chairs were overturned, money rolled upon the floor and was trampled under foot, men tore the coats from their neighbors' backs in their struggles to lay their hands upon him. I leaped from my chair to the floor to save myself from being borne down in the rush and fought and struggled myself, not to get nearer the doomed man, but to reach the door, to get away from the horror of it, to leave that hell behind, and get out into God's friendly night and see His stars above. But the crush was too great and the tide of it bore me the other way, bore me to where the wretched creature was beaten down to the floor, trampled, clutched at, bleeding, but defending himself with the savageness of a beast at bay. But for no long time. In a few moments there was no more struggling and heaving there, only deep panting, and low hurried consultation; and then the tide set the other way and I was borne toward the door, and behind me Something that no longer resisted was dragged and thrust along, down the stairs, and into the street. But not before the word had gone, for hundreds of men stood gathered there (and even some women hovered on the outskirts of the crowd), into the sea toward which our torrent poured, and was swallowed up and borne along with it,

As we swept across the sidewalk, the sudden impact of the denser crowd stayed our progress for a moment, and struggling to free myself from the mass as it hung there swaying, I found myself grasped by the shoulders and pulled out of it to one side. My rescuer was Mr. Walpole, who, panting with his exertions, put his face close to mine in the half-light, and I saw that it was very white.

"For God's sake, what is it?" he asked.

Before I could answer him the crowd upon the stairs was under way again and that limp, bleeding, half-killed Thing was supported past us in the grasp of half a dozen men. Mr. Walpole pressed forward.

"Don't look!" I cried, seizing his arm. "For God's sake, Uncle Rand, don't look!"

But he had seen. Never shall I forget the look on his face as he staggered back and shut out the sight with his hand. Never shall I forget how he stood thus a moment, and then, with that mad throng surging about him, and amid the yells and curses and cries for the blood of the murderer, with his hat off, his hand on my shoulder and his furrowed face turned up to the stars, moved his lips in silent prayer to the One who looked down on him and on his trespasser and had said, "Vengeance is mine."

"Come," he said, simply, putting on his hat again. "We must not turn away now."

Torches had flared up on the outskirts of the crowd, and the bearers of these, waving them aloft, started off in an orderly march up the street toward the summit of the hill, and the crowd, with the prisoner in the center, fell into line and followed after. The shouting had died out by degrees, and soon from all that dark, sinister, swaying mass, there came no sound save a low, rolling murmur, like the distant booming of mountain waters rushing through their dark ravines with unalterable course.

We fell in behind. Briefly, I told Mr. Walpole what had taken place upstairs. He only repeated his former

words, "We must not turn away now." Soon, the low, black buildings and ghostly chimneys of the mine loomed in view and the crowd, spreading out like a fan, overran the enclosure, climbing upon the heaps of crushed ore that were scattered about, upon piles of cinders and refuse, upon derricks and carts, upon the low roofs of the buildings, upon anything that afforded an elevation from which to look down upon the scene below. It was soon complete. In the center of the ring of torches, which threw their red glare upon the bared head and terror-smitten face of the wretch who had been brought there to die, and upon the stern faces of those who had constituted themselves his judges, the awful work was swiftly done. Against the blackened wall of a rude shed which covered the opening of an abandoned shaft, the now pinioned and drooping form was dragged and thrust under the projecting roof beams. A rope was brought, a noose formed, the end thrown over the scantling above; twenty hands grasped at it as it fell.

"Stop!"

As in a dream, I saw my guardian standing in the glare of the torches with upraised hand; I saw the executioners wheel and confront him with lowering faces; I saw the gleam of weapons leveled at his breast; I saw the prisoner raise his agonized face; I heard the fierce yell which broke from the lusting crowd.

"Men, I am not here to plead mercy for the man you are going to kill. I am here to demand justice for those whom he has wronged. If you kill that man, his crimes die with him. I demand delay and a court of law!"

A deep hush followed these words. Save for the heave in the crowd as it pressed closer there was no movement; the weapons still covered the intrepid speaker; the prisoner's eyes had not left the face; the hands that clutched the rope stayed still. Then one who held a torch stepped forward and spoke:

"Old man, you are a stranger in these parts, I don't know



your face. Listen: The hound that dies here to-night is a murderer taken in the act. Listen: If that murder had never been done he would still die here to-night, if his neck had come into our hands the same. Listen: Five year ago that man came here among us and opened this mine where we stand. We put our money into it, every last man of us. The mine was good, we know it, and if it'd been worked we'd have our savings to-day. It wasn't worked—that hound stole our money. Tom Byers blew his brains out at the foot of that shaft when he heard it. Jim Harson died in the asylum and his widow's on the town to-day. Twenty more tramped out of town, their families with 'em. Enough of that; stand back, old man; that man dies where he stands and his carcass'll rot down that shaft!"

A fierce, responsive yell broke from the waiting crowd. The man with the torch stepped back and raised his hand, and the men that held the rope threw their weight upon it. A scream burst from the doomed man.

"Stop!" cried Mr. Walpole, again. "I know this man's crimes. I know them better than do you who hear me. I am myself a loser in this mine under our feet. I am its largest loser. I am a sufferer through an even greater crime of that man's, and it is because of these things that I demand of you that he be let live till we have full justice of him, not the mere revenge that his death here to-night would bring us. Listen: You say you know this mine under our feet is good. I know it, too, and I am here to prove it. I am here to open this mine again, to make it repay the money this town has put into it, and more with it. I have bought up the claims of every eastern creditor; after this month the Bald Knob will no longer be administered from Boston or by Boston capital; it will no longer be run with one shift of men merely to keep up a show of activity; the whole force will be put back, every shaft will be worked, yes, and new ones sunk—the Bald Knob once more belongs to you who shall work her. That is my

message to Pitmouth, though God knows I had not thought to deliver it thus."

For a few moments there was an incredulous silence—Oh, if they had not believed those words!—but they had rung too true, and as I caught my breath a mighty cheer burst from the crowd. Torches were waved in the air, hats were flying skyward, and men grasped one another's hands in the darkness. The ring was overflowed in a moment, and I saw my guardian the center of a pushing, struggling throng, intent upon seeing the face and touching the hand of the man who had bought back the Bald Knob for her own. The mob spirit was gone—gone in a twinkling. Someone had run to the engine-house, and now a terrific blast of the whistle split the night; long and louder it shrieked, awaking the echoes for miles around, informing the town, could it have understood the signal, of its great and good fortune.

My guardian was quick to see his advantage.

"Men," he cried, "we are partners together in the Bald Knob; be partners with me in justice and turn that man over to the law!"

The prisoner had been forgotten. The men who held the rope had been the first to surround my guardian and to lead the cheering. But as these words rang out there was a choking cry, and the pinioned man was seen to reel and fall on his face. In a second my guardian had reached his side, knelt beside him, loosened his bonds, and turned him gently on his back. His eyes opened and looked into the eyes of the man he had wronged. His lips seemed to move; my guardian bent over him and the rough men who had gathered round, and who a few moments before had been ready to take that ebbing life, fell back. I saw a mute question addressed to those filming eyes, I think an answer was returned. None too soon. My guardian rose and stepped back; the others approached and lifted the body and carried it away.

The sensation caused by these tragic happenings was short-lived, or rather it speedily became merged in another, for, almost at the same time, had occurred another event as tragic, of which the town learned the next morning. The Cannon Ball express to St. Louis had gone down with a burning bridge only a few hours after it left Pitmouth, and another terrible disaster was added to the bloody history of railroading in the West. It might have nothing to do with this history but for the fact that the peculiar nature of the accident, which plunged the train into a stream, with the consequent loss of many bodies and the mangling of others beyond recognition, made possible the publication of a death roll that was, in at least one instance, erroneous. Hasty telegrams of inquiry, directed to the station-masters along the road, had elicited the names of those who had purchased tickets for the train, and the identified, the unidentified, and the missing must be made to fit that tally. The result was that in the morning the St. Louis papers published the name of George Parvin among the dead.

Nearly the whole population of the town was at the station the next day at noon when the St. Louis train came in, for they all knew the story now and knew who would be on it. Oh, the pity of the coming! Widowed so long through a cruel deception, widowed now indeed in the very moment of her new wifehood!

There was commotion on the steps as the train came to a standstill and the passengers alighted; sympathetic ones were bearing her up and trying to comfort her, but she broke from them all and ran, a slight pretty figure, and threw herself into my mother's outstretched arms.

"Oh, I know it!" she sobbed. "I know it! He was on that train and he was killed! Oh, why did he come to meet me! He was coming to me, he died coming to me! Oh, George, George!"

And because no one told her then, it became a harder and harder thing to do; and in the end Pitmouth entered

into a conspiracy *not* to tell her, and Pitmouth was loyal, and she never was told.

"You see," said my father to Mr. Walpole and me in the privacy of the inner sanctum, "the Captain had known Princep was in the neighborhood. He had had confidential information from—er—professional friends from several nearby places where the ruined man had been seen desperately trying to win at play. There is no doubt whatever that he had lost everything."

"You think," asked Mr. Walpole, in a low voice, "that necessity had driven him back here?"

My father nodded. "Necessity and the danger he ran of capture in the East after his money gave out. Familiarity with the towns about here probably led him to consider the locality safer than any other. Then, too, the gambling-places—and he had a passion for play—were an attraction and offered him a chance to live."

"Then," I asked, "it was about *him* the Captain came to see you that first time I met him here in the office?"

My father nodded. "He had just then heard that he was near. Parvin thought it possible that he might communicate with me—I had stood his friend so far as I could—and exacted a promise from me to let him know if he disclosed himself. But he never did."

"But why was the Captain so anxious to get trace of him?" I urged.

My father laid his hand on my knee. "Boy," he said, gravely, "he wanted to warn him. He wanted to supply his wants. He wanted to give him money and to get him away from here. He knew the feeling here and what would be his fate if caught. They had been friends; the Captain had believed in him, there was nothing he would not have done to ensure the other's safety and comfort wherever he might choose to live away from here. Gambler or not, duellist, bad man—what you will—Parvin was a generous

and loyal friend to those he believed in—and while he believed in them; as good a friend as he was an enemy.”

“And he ceased to believe in Princep the day he had the interview with you and learned that his wife was alive?”

I said, beginning to see light.

“Yes,” said my father, gravely, “Princep was the man who had confirmed that lie to him. I knew when he went out that door that he would kill him on sight.”

## CHAPTER XXX

### OF NO CONSEQUENCE WHATEVER—SAVE TO THE AUTHOR

**M**Y guardian and I went back to St. Louis the next day, and at the end of the week he and Starbright returned to Boston.

"But not for long," he told me, as he bade me good-bye. "The rest of my life's work lies out yonder on that hill where those men cheered that night." I think I was the only one who noticed when they went away that both wore slight mourning, and I knew then that there had been an answer returned to that question which the wronged man had asked his wrongdoer when they had looked into each other's faces in the torchlight's glare.

When I settled down to work again, it was with the determination that my improved prospects should make no difference to me whatever. Although rich, I was still a subordinate in a house in which my cousin was a partner, and I should see to it—and see that others saw—that I in no way presumed upon these circumstances or exalted myself above my station. In particular I was anxious to relieve Mr. Cressey of any apprehension that I might chafe under his authority, and spared no pains to show him that, although a favorite of fortune, I was willing that things should go on as before. I didn't want *him* to be in awe of me, of all men. And I succeeded.

"Bibbus," he said, one day, "I've spoken to you several times about using your own pens and leaving mine alone; and if I have occasion to do so again you'll find yourself out in the outer office and I'll have Cram in here to help

me." And after that I felt that there was no danger of our relations becoming strained on account of my money. And yet I could not but feel that recent events had placed me on a different footing with Kate, and entitled my suit to the formal sanction of the family. Before, it would have been a most tremendous thing to have said to Mr. Cressey, "Excuse me, sir, but when you get to the bottom of that column I should like to say a few words to you on the subject of your daughter." Now, I felt I could make that speech and have the right to expect that Mr. Cressey would lay his pen down respectfully and say: "Ah, Mr. Bibbus, that is a subject very near to a father's heart, and I am getting to be an old man; but say on, my dear sir, I will hear you, if my feelings are not too many for me." And I did make it. I made it one night when we were working late at the office together, and everyone else had gone. I made it with what breath I had and thought when it was too late that I would have done better to have written him a letter. Mr. Cressey didn't lay his pen down, but he lifted it from the paper, and without looking at me asked, in exactly the same tone he had used in calling off the items on the invoice before him, "How old are you, Bibbus?" "I'm—well, I'm going on twenty," I said, putting it that way—it seemed older than nineteen, anyway. "Just so," said Mr. Cressey, dipping his pen in the ink again, "the next item is seven-hundred-fourteen, twelve." Seven-hundred-fourteen, twelve! A pretty answer to a formal proposal from a man (going on twenty) with my prospects! But it was the only answer Mr. Cressey would give me, and upon reflection I decided that it was not so bad after all; it showed there was no objection save my age, and a man isn't always going on twenty!

How I ceased "going on" to it in time and reached it, passed it, and was "going on" twenty-one (a long time), and reached that, together with all else that happened in between, are things that I shall only indicate here and not

narrate; for life is only just begun now, and I have no fancy for an epilogue.

I have then to indicate how my guardian soon took up his permanent residence at Pitmouth and devoted all his energies to redeeming his promise to develop the Bald Knob.

How that property repaid, in no long time, the most extravagant hopes of its believers and conferred upon the town a prosperity never dreamed of.

How the firm of Bibbus & Walpole, whose management had accomplished these great results, prospered as much, and became a sort of public possession of the town, no less prized than the Bald Knob itself—pointed out, quoted, and regularly puffed by the sidewalk orators as the makers and chief props of the community.

How its senior member was at last elected mayor (thus achieving in my mother's estimation a long step toward the senatorship), and administered that exalted office with a grace and dignity that charmed all beholders, moving Major Popplewick to say, upon the occasion of his re-nomination, that they had seen a Pitkin succeeded by a Bibbus without disquiet, but were his fellow citizens prepared to see a Bibbus succeeded by anybody else, with the same feelings? He asked them, Were they prepared to risk the rash experiment and then go home to the bosom of their families, gather those trusting faces round their hearths, and say to them, "Behold, I have this day staked our peace, our quiet, and our unbroken slumbers upon the cast of a die! Were they prepared to do it?" And they were not.

How Harold rose rapidly with his new opportunities and fulfilled all my expectations of him, achieving a success in his chosen field which seemed only natural and proper when I recalled how he had sized up the town that day we first walked up from the levee, and had said he believed a fellow might do well there!

How he used regularly to go down to Pitmouth every Saturday night to see Starbright, with the result that on



the Monday he as regularly dragged me out to look at a house he had had his eye on which he thought a fellow might buy for a song if he tackled the agent right.

How I was emboldened at last by these significant appearances to take him out to see Kate, and how I could scarcely contain myself for joy and pride when I saw how he admired her, and how she was her own pretty, unaffected, captivating self and ran and fetched the bookmark and showed him, and made him admire the cactus (which had grown nearly half an inch), and blushed and laughed and stopped her ears at his bold praise of me, and pretended she didn't believe half he was saying, and declared we had made it all up between us; how Harold clapped me on the back when we came away and said I was a lucky dog, but a precious sly one, to have fooled him with that cock-and-bull story about the Latin lessons (forgetting that they had been his own invention), but that he would forgive me, and come to think of it, there was another house only a few blocks away from the one he had his eye on, if I would like to look at it, which he thought could be got for another song.

How Clara Parvin, released from the tyranny that had robbed her life of all light and joy, of the happiness of a wife, even of the sacred sorrow of a widow, found a peaceful and happy home under my father's roof, living over again in the companionship of Starbright and my mother (who looked and acted, and probably considered herself quite as young as they) the wasted years of her youth, till it bloomed again in her cheek and eye to delight every honest heart there that knew her story, and loyally sealed up the secret that had spared her its dark sequel.

How the time came at last to execute the remaining provisions of the will which should place my inheritance in my hands; how it was done with another big dinner exactly like Harold's, except that we had it at Pitmouth, with many new faces round the board, my father's and my mother's,

and Kate's (whom my mother would not let stir from her side, but petted and coddled with such a beaming happiness on her own face that I saw directly that she had another affair of great importance on her hands and that in all probability I should have nothing further to do with my own lovemaking), and Clara's, and Major Popplewick's, and how my father made the speech of the evening and caused great terror and shrieking and hiding behind the floral decorations, by announcing that as a magistrate he had only to spread out his hands and utter a certain form, and we would all be married directly!

How I elected to put all my inheritance into the Bald Knob, jokingly exacting from Mr. Sydenham a promise of my old desk back if the mine should smash a second time, and thus, after seven happy years in the office and in the home of the kindest of men, I quit them, each of us with feelings we did not care to show, to take up the work which was the fruition of my hopes and ambitions since I had first heard the name of the Bald Knob recited in the affairs of my parents and friends.

How Mr. Cressey no longer said seven-hundred-fourteen, twelve, when I backed him into a corner regularly once a week (I was coming up from Pitmouth now every Saturday night, while Harold went down; we occasionally met at the railroad station while bolting for or from our respective trains and shook hands hastily), and renewed a certain topic, but invariably took refuge in a proposal for a game of checkers, which Kate would cruelly second, and there was another evening wasted!

How Mrs. Cressey's memory continued active, supplying me with a continuous variety of her brother William's adventures, sayings, views on various topics, and personal reasons for preferring pea soup to cold beans in contingencies where it was imperative to choose one or the other for a regular diet; and how that extraordinary woman could never understand that I wanted to marry Kate, but per-

versely supposed that I came there for reasons connected solely with the cotton business—when she did not harbor dark suspicions that I had an eye to the china plates in Mr. Sydenham's interests, it being equally impossible for her to remember, though told repeatedly, that I was no longer in that gentleman's employ—replying firmly to all remonstrances, "Let him wait till I'm dead!" and referring pathetically to the door-knobs.

How my father still retained his interest in the *Clarion*, though relinquishing its active control in favor of his other growing duties, and published signed articles, double-ledged, whenever the public interest seemed to demand it; how he often remarked, shaking his head doubtfully, that he really didn't know, in view of the amount of legal business made necessary by the extensive operations of the firm, but that he should decide to take up the study of the law when he found the time; how, as his worldly possessions increased and he found himself more and more an important figure in the town, the memory of his early misfortunes began to lose its sharpness of detail, and he was able at times so far to persuade himself that those early days were, on the whole, rather prosperous than otherwise, as actually to lament them, and refer to them, feelingly, as "good old times" when he was a figure in the "book world."

"For," he said, argumentatively, his hands clasped across his breast with his fingers interlocked, and his head inclined toward me as I sat opposite him, quite in our old manner, "for, viewed dispassionately, and dismissing from our minds all prejudices engendered by the occasional—er—shall I say stagnation?—of trade, rendering our income—not to speak at present of profits—uncertain and fluctuating—I might say problematical—viewed apart from these things,—the book business, in and of itself (if I may so express myself), was a most fascinating and congenial pursuit. And then, if you will stop to think, the profits, the *possible* profits, might well be immense. Why, what if a Grolier had come into

my hands! I calculate," said my father, rubbing his hands and beaming upon me, "that one single Grolier would have been worth more than the total annual output of the Bald Knob! Think of that!"

"But you never got hold of one," I objected.

"I am aware of that," returned my father, a little warmly. "I am putting the case to you as an illustration; I say *what* if I had got hold of one! And I was on the lookout," he said, firmly, as if the consciousness of having been in that attitude of alertness was only less consoling than the actual getting hold of the treasure would have been, "I was on the lookout constantly. Not a book ever passed through my hands, however unpromising its exterior, that I didn't look for the Grolier mark! Ah!" said my father, shaking his head with a learned air, "those simple words, GROLIERII ET AMICORUM might not have meant much to the casual eye, but I was alive to their importance! And I say again, this mining business is profitable; the newspaper business, if not profitable, is pleasant and stirring to the blood; and the freely offered suffrages of my fellow citizens are, I will admit, a grateful and touching tribute; but I can not altogether ignore the reflection that sometimes forces itself upon my mind that, after all, I might have done better had I remained true to my—er—literary and bibliographical instincts. Mind," said my father, with a wave of his hand, "I do not argue altogether from a utilitarian standpoint, but viewed largely, you understand, largely and aside from merely material considerations." And, viewed even in this way, I was still of the opinion that my father would have made it exceedingly interesting for any genie who should have proposed, with a ring or lamp, to rub him out of his mayoralty back to the old bookshop again and the chances of a Grolier turning up!

How my mother (dressing a little more carefully and perhaps a trifle more youthfully since Starbright and Clara came) never tired of telling how she had maintained against

us all her unshaken belief in the existence of the will back of the wainscoting or in the chimney, and how it was found at last exactly where she said it was—or, at any rate, in the place where it had been deposited after being removed from there.

"And depend upon it, child," she said to me, shaking her head firmly, "that will would never have been made in your favor but for my insisting, against the most violent and almost profane opposition of your father, upon naming you in your Uncle Sumner's honor. You have *me* to thank for that!" How she never forgave Mr. Hynson for what she always believed was his intentional and provocative neglect to forward her the *Ladies' Wreaths* as she had requested him to do, and how that lost volume, becoming every year more and more priceless, grew to be at last a sort of mythological tradition, or Family Legend, borne about, as it were, symbolically by my mother, as a kind of Ark containing the Law, and referred to and quoted by her as the highest and final authority on every subject that came up. Indeed, after it ceased to be a mere book, it became possessed of a miraculously changing character, being no less a Symbol and a Sign than, when occasion demanded, a Formula, a Prophecy, and an Omen. The neighbors, I believe, had the most hazy and conflicting ideas as to the nature of this mysterious Heirloom, it being variously understood to be a Royal Grant made to my mother's ancestors, a Patent of Nobility, and a Treasury Claim; in view of which posthumous fame I suppose my mother's interest in the old blue-cloth volume was very much like my father's solicitude for the "good old times" and the problematical Grolier—mostly illusory and altogether academic; and if anyone had suddenly appeared before her with the volume in his hand, I imagine that person would have been considerably surprised at his reception.

How the time came at last when I beat Mr. Cressey at checkers—beat him regularly—and his moral authority

being thus effectively lowered, he could make no further stand against me, and capitulated, and Kate and I—but stay; the actors have all made their exits, to right and left, why stand I here, now the play is done, worse than idle? If I defer my bow for a moment to afford a last peep for some more curious than the rest—or less sensible, perhaps, of the limitations of Art,—the more sophisticated do not have to look.

What, then, are these bulky objects I find piled upon a chair when I come home at night—the chair drawn close to the tea-table as if to elevate somebody, a very short Somebody, surely! to the level of the board? The *Commentaries*? They are, they are! Oh, Cæsar, thou Caius Julius, who didst divide all Gaul into three parts (not to mention other literary and military feats of a like stupendous nature), rest thee, thy task is here! Long hast thou stood on neglected shelves, long waited, vainly beckoning into Gaul where none would follow; but at last thy reward is come and thy task is here, well waited for—for is it not written that they also serve who only stand and wait?

THE END

